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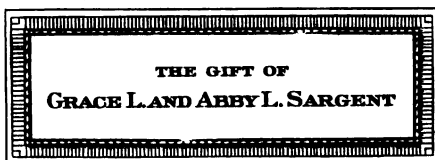
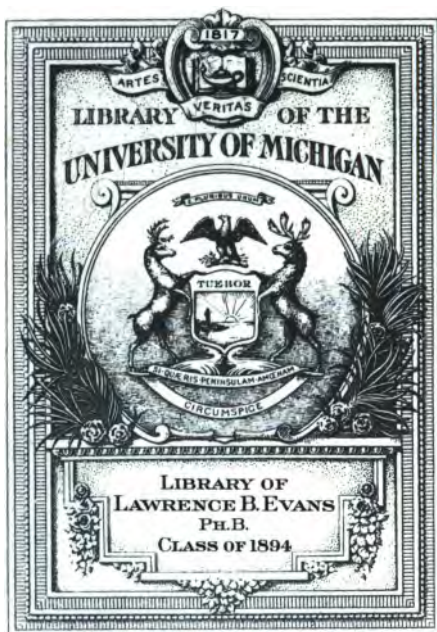
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MISS EYRE FROM BOSTON,

AND OTHERS.

BY

Mrs. LOUISE (CHANDLER) MOULTON,

AUTHOR OF SOME WOMEN'S HEARTS, RANDOM RAMBLES, OURSELVES AND OUR
NEIGHBORS, POEMS BY L. C. M., BED-TIME STORIES, MORE BED-TIME
STORIES, NEW BED-TIME STORIES, FIRELIGHT STORIES, ETC.

She is a woman, therefore may be woo'd;
She is a woman, therefore may be won.

TITUS ANDRONICUS.



BOSTON:
ROBERTS BROTHERS.
1889.

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BY LOUISE CHANDLER MOULTON.



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TO
FIVE GIRLS OF BOSTON:

AUGUSTA CLINTON WINTHROP,

LOUISE IMOGEN GUINEY,

MARION BOYD ALLEN,

ROSE HOLLINGSWORTH,

MARGARET RUTHVEN LANG,

I Offer these Stories.

L. C. M.

MAY, 1889.

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MISS EYRE FROM BOSTON.

I.

PLASH, plash, plash, went the rain on the walls at Kissingen; "tootle-te-tootle," the band in the pavilion.

If ever there was an unbearable impertinence, it is this of the band, tooting away in the midst of a spiteful, uncompromising rain. You must get up and dress, no doubt, if the Cure means anything, and drink your glasses of Racoczy water, and walk to and fro between them, like the nameless prince of the lower kingdom; but why should the band play this mad waltz music, as if to persuade you that you love to tramp through mud and rain, and that bitter water is as good as "Mumm's Extra Dry"?

Gladys Eyre would not have owned that she was cross; but she would, no doubt, have acknowledged that she was discouraged, that the music was a bore, and that life at Kissingen, even on a fine day, was excessively monotonous and uninteresting. She wondered why on earth she had come. To be sure, she had not been very strong since that London season four years ago; and there might be something in the

doctor's notion that she needed building up. But were there no springs of healing nearer home for this daughter of the stars and stripes?

What a curious thing it was that old astrologer said to her just before she left America! It had been the Theosophical winter in Boston. It is always the — something — winter in that wonderful city; but perhaps nothing else had ever quite so forcibly taken hold of it as did Theosophy. If you went out to drink five o'clock tea, and shake hands with your neighbors, you found the company broken up into groups, and in the centre of each one some eloquent woman discoursing of reincarnation, and Karma, and Devachan — yes, and of black and white magic. And it was one of the true Theosophical believers who sent Gladys to that astrologer who had never been able to make his own fortune, glittering as were the fortunes he lightly dispensed to his followers, promising them a spare million or two as lavishly as if money grew like weeds.

Gladys wondered a little that the stars had not been more generous to their votary, when she entered his shabby little place on Green Street; but so stately was his dignity, so unbounded his self-possession, so at home was he in his celestial kingdom, that she presently concluded his lowliness of condition must be the result of his sublime indifference to the base uses of this world. He cast her horoscope; he told her her own character, as if he were her familiar dæmon. What she felt, what she could do — by some strange clairvoyance he seemed to be aware of them all.

Gladys listened eagerly ; then, woman-like, she reached out her hand for the apple of forbidden knowledge.

“ And my future ? ” she asked timidly.

Professor Bodensky looked out from under his shaggy brows and searched her face with keen dark eyes.

“ It is not well,” he said, “ that I tell you farther than concerns this summer. You will cross the sea. You go to meet your fate. You will hold in your hand a cup of joy, and a woman will take it from you. Still, your fate will be in your own hands. You can defy even the stars, if you will.”

Gladys Eyre shivered. Could it be true ? She had not thought at that time of crossing the sea ; and as for going to meet her fate, had not Fate taken shape for her already, and was not its name Robert Otis ?

She went out into the March afternoon with a vague terror fluttering at her heart. She stopped at her Aunt Mehitable Quincy’s on her way home. Miss Eyre was herself a Quincy, on her mother’s side ; and though the marriage that transformed Helen Quincy, with her Mayflower traditions, into Helen Eyre, the wife of a man with no traditions at all, but plenty of brains and plenty of money, — though this marriage had found scant favor with the Quincy connection, yet the sole fruit of it, the fair Gladys, was certainly the chief pet and darling of her maiden aunt, Mehitable, who was also her godmother.

Miss Mehitable Quincy lived in one of the fine old houses at the head of Mt. Vernon Street ; and into it

Gladys walked, with the wonder and mystery born of the astrologer's prediction still haunting her.

The house was a large old-fashioned one; but the room where Miss *Mehitable* sat was above all else cosy. There were cushioned recesses in the windows, screens to shut off the impertinence of draughts, the easiest of easy-chairs, plenty of flowers and ferns, and before the soft coal fire glowing on the hearth sat the nicest, neatest, most thorough-bred little old lady you could find, even in Boston.

"Welcome! above all times welcome!" she chirped cordially, as turning her head when she heard the door open, she saw Gladys.

The girl went forward into the warm fire-glow and kissed the cheek, bright and a little withered, like a winter apple, which Aunt *Mehitable* offered her.

"And why now, of all times, especially welcome?" she asked gayly.

"Because Dr. Lyman has just gone."

"And I'm to fill his place? I should have to be six girls to do that."

"No, foolish one, you are not to fill his place; but you are to obey his orders. He sends us to Kissingen, you and me. I've been there time and again, you know, and it always helps me; and Dr. Lyman says you are getting languid, and looking paler than you ought, and you need the change quite as much as I do. We'll start in April; we'll spend May in London, and stop a few days at Brussels and a few in Cologne, and get to Kissingen about the middle of June. I've

planned it all out. I'll take Pauline to wait on us. She's a good traveller. You will have no trouble, and I'll not bore you any more than I do at home."

The very heart of Gladys Eyre seemed to stand still.

"You will cross the sea. You go to meet your fate. You will hold in your hand a cup of joy, and a woman will take it from you."

These words had the astrologer spoken, and when she heard them she had not the least notion how they could possibly be fulfilled; and yet already was not a door opening?

"You really want me, Aunt Mehitable?" she asked. "Will they let me go?"

"They." meant the father and mother at home.

"Of course they will. Why not? They have each other for company. You are my godchild, and I want you. It will cost them nothing. Go home and dream of pictures and cathedrals and German bands. You have four weeks in which to get ready, and persuade Robert Otis to be contented."

II.

AND it had all come to pass as Miss Mehitable had planned. Four weeks to get ready, ten days at sea, a month in London, a lazy fortnight *en route* for Kissingen, and now here she had been for nearly a week, drinking the waters and growing blue under their

effect, as every one does at first. She was not exactly homesick. Indeed, she wished she could have missed Robert Otis more, since they were to be married the coming winter. It troubled her vaguely to see how easily she could get along without him; but he had never been an exacting lover. He had never cared for any one but Gladys, and he had proposed to her first before that London season, which had been such an epoch in her life, and again every year since. The last time he said, "I shall ask you every year, Gladys, until some luckier fellow gets you." He had been taken quite by surprise when she answered, —

"Oh, I might as well say yes now as ever. I suppose it will come to that; and I shall be twenty-five next winter, and it would be a very reasonable time to settle down."

Thinking this scene over, as she walked through the pouring rain at Kissingen, she remembered how dim Robert's eyes had been for a moment. She half thought there were tears in them, but of course Rob was not foolish enough for that. But he was moved, and his voice sounded almost solemn when he said, —

"God bless you, Gladys. I'll try to be half good enough to deserve you."

Still, it seemed a very matter-of-fact sort of wooing when Gladys looked back to it. Life would be matter-of-fact with her and Robert, she fancied. She would live in the Otis mansion, and Madam Otis would instruct her in the family traditions, and give her hints about housekeeping; and she should like

Robert very well, no doubt, and it would all be as it should be. Then suddenly she cried out with passion,—

“No, it won’t; I shall hate it all.”

And then her thoughts went back to that London summer four years ago, and the handsome Hungarian who was almost her shadow, who went everywhere she went, and never seemed to care for any one else, and then at the end went away without even asking her address or saying one word about any future meeting.

Gladys had grown thinner and paler since then. Would he know her now, she wondered. And he—were those dangerous dark eyes of his as deeply dark as ever, and did his voice thrill with the old music? Oh, how long ago it was, all of it! And now she was almost twenty-five, and almost married.

Just then her umbrella, which she was holding low, hit another umbrella, and the collision nearly knocked off her hat. She righted herself as best she could, lifted the umbrella higher, and looked straight into the unforgotten eyes of Istvan Varnay.

“A thousand times I beg pardon,” he said in the old unforgotten tones, with the old unforgotten thrill in them, and then added suddenly, “Good heavens, Miss Eyre! It is never you!”

“I think it is Herr Istvan Varnay whom I have the pleasure of seeing again?” Gladys said, with her accent of gentle inquiry.

Just then the band struck up as though mad, and almost drowned his answer; and then the two walked

on, as if four years and over were nothing, and the Cure Garden of Kissingen were Hyde Park. Up and down the rainy paths they paced together, and after a few moments Istvan Varnay asked, —

“What has happened to you in the years since that year? Have they been full or empty?”

“Empty for the most part,” she answered lightly. “I’ve lived in Boston and informed my mind, — everybody does that in Boston, — and just now I’m engaged to be married. That is not of very long standing, though. His name is Robert Otis, and he is a very good young man.”

She had spoken in such an absurdly matter-of-fact way that Istvan Varnay gave her a sudden keen look out of the unforgotten dark eyes.

“You do not like him, then?” he hazarded.

“Yes; I should not be engaged to him if I did not.”

He looked into her eyes again, steadfastly, daringly. Then a smile curled his mustached lip.

“I remember now. You have two words. You like him, — yes; you love him, — no; else you would not be here and Mr. Robert Otis in Boston.”

Miss Eyre shrugged her shoulders slightly. It was a trick she had caught from a French governess she once had.

“I am not sentimental about him, if you mean that; but he is the very best man I know, and the rest will come, of course, when I am married.”

“Oh! So!” the Hungarian answered. “But I think you could love, all the same. I used to think

so. However, you are four years older ; and I suppose hearts grow old fast in a city where it is the business to inform the mind."

That was the first of many walks and talks. Aunt Mehitable was the least exacting, as also she was the most trusting of chaperones. With her novel for afternoons, and her books of science for mornings, with Pauline to wait on her, and the Cure for a daily occupation, she was quite willing Gladys should amuse herself in her own way. The Hungarian had been duly presented, and had talked patriotism a little. Kossuth had kissed Miss Mehitable's hand long years ago, when he was in America, and that kiss was one of the events of Aunt Mehitable's eventless life ; and the countryman of Kossuth made a most favorable impression on her. She understood that he and Gladys had been friends four years ago, when Istvan Varnay had been an attaché of the Austrian embassy in London, and it seemed to her most natural that they should have a good deal to say to each other on meeting again.

Gladys corresponded with Robert Otis on postal cards. She sent one dutifully by every steamer ; and she was grateful to Dr. Heckenlauer for forbidding her to write letters. It was such a good excuse. It procured her immunity alike from demands and from blame, and gave her time to make up her mind. What she had to make up her mind about she could hardly have told. Istvan Varnay had certainly given her no absolute reason to think he wished to marry

her. It was just like the old days in London, when wherever she went he went also, when he seemed to care for no one else, and when his eyes said all that his lips did not say. Gladys ought by this time to have grown wiser, but even at almost twenty-five, human nature—I mean feminine human nature—is human nature still.

Aunt Mehitable rejoiced in the improvement she saw in Gladys, at whom she looked from a medical point of view. How bright the girl's eyes were; how her cheeks glowed; what good the Cure was doing her! Her scheme was turning out a triumphant success, for Gladys at least; and her kind heart was gladdened thereat.

III.

THREE weeks went by,—three weeks of constant meetings, of morning walks, of singing to the piano in the Casino in the early afternoon, of dancing when the dancing nights came, or sitting out the dances yet more dangerously in the soft, blossom-scented open air and talking.

A still small voice—was it that of Gladys Eyre's guardian angel?—used to whisper to her sometimes, and question whether Istvan Varnay really meant any more now than he had meant four summers ago, but Gladys repulsed the suggestion. He had not forgotten her in all these years; and now they were both older, and disposed to take things more seriously.

He told her he had missed her every hour of every day. Was it likely he would let her go from him again without a word?

"What of Robert Otis?" the intrusive voice whispered now and then.

"Robby, good, kind, dear old Robby, he would get along," so she answered the voice. "Robby was not romantic enough to take things to heart very deeply. Some other, better girl would do for him."

One morning she rose early, a little earlier than usual. The music, the mad, merry music, was playing under her window.

"Come out," it seemed to say; "come out and be glad. Toot! toot! toot! Don't you hear what a gay world it is?"

And Gladys obeyed the summons. She drank her first morning glass, and then she wandered a little way on the road toward the Salene, crossed the bridge, and entered on the woodland path. It had seldom been so long before Istvan Varnay joined her. She felt a vague sense of disquiet. Was she then caring for him too much? Would life be too lonely without him? Suddenly she heard a step behind her, and looked over her shoulder. He was hurrying after her.

"I am late," he said, as he drew nigh. "Some friends came by the 11.09 train last night, and I have been hindered against my will. It is always against my will, if I am kept from you."

Then suddenly he caught her hands in his and held them hard.

"Gladys, promise me this one thing, only this, — that whenever I am kept from you, and even if I were kept from you forever, you will believe it to be against my will! My will would be to be with you always. Do you not *know* it? I love you; not as your good, wise young man in Boston loves you, but madly, so that I want you, — you, and not anything else in the world."

She had drawn away her hands while he spoke, and he reached out for them again; but before he had clasped them, a mocking voice, clear as a bell, said gayly, —

"Ah, I find you! Introduce me, please, to this so fair friend of yours. She will like to know your wife. Is it not so?"

Gladys turned and confronted a dark-eyed Hungarian beauty, the feminine counterpart of Istvan Varnay, with eyes as dark and bright as his, with the same heavy dark hair, the same gypsy-like warmth of cheek and lip, — the most superb woman, from a purely physical point of view, that the Boston girl had ever seen. Gladys Eyre, if she were nothing else, was thoroughbred. Her family had not nursed Mayflower traditions for nothing. She looked with quiet, serene eyes at the new-comer, and then inquiringly at Istvan Varnay.

"Yes," said that gentleman, "this is my wife. Miss Eyre, Mme. Istvan Varnay."

Gladys put out her small gloved hand with friendly gesture, and said graciously, —

"I am charmed to meet you, madam. Your hus-

band and I are ~~old~~ friends of four years ago, and had lost each other completely until some odd fate brought us together again in Kissingen; and we have been trying to help each other cheat the dulness of the place."

"And I should think you had well succeeded," the Hungarian said, showing all her beautiful, strong teeth in a smile; "well succeeded, if I judge from *your* — what shall I say? — aspect when I did come nigh. I give the air to my little dog. I will not distract you longer from trying to cheat the dulness of the place."

And with a bow and a half-mocking smile she went on her way.

Gladys was silent with a silence that said more than words.

"You know all now," Istvan Varnay cried bitterly. "You know that I love you; I swear *that* is true, and you know how useless it is."

"Were you married, then, four years ago?" Gladys asked quietly.

"No, but I was betrothed. She was my cousin. It was my interest to marry her, and it had been settled a long time. When I met you I loved you, but I left you without a word. A Hungarian gentleman does not break his betrothal vows."

"No! He only tries his best and his uttermost to win a woman's heart and spoil her life for her, and goes away in silence. And when he is a married man he plays again at the old game a little more desperately. That is all."

Varnay looked at her. The morning sunshine was in her pale brown hair; her blue eyes had a keen pitiless ray in them; and her unsmiling lips curled a little.

"Gladys," he asked, "do you scorn me?"

"Rather!" and then a smile as cold as moonlight crossed the girl's lips.

He took her hands, which lay in his eager grasp, chill and soft and unresponsive as snow.

"Gladys," he said, "this, then, is indeed good-by. Scorn me how you will, I have loved you with the one love of my life. Will you pity me a little, for it is I who must suffer! You have never kissed me yet. Kiss me once, now, even though you scorn me, since it is all I can have of you forever. Have a little mercy upon me, and kiss me once for farewell."

"I am glad that at least I am spared that memory," the girl answered, looking at him with that light, keen and cold as the flash of steel, in her eyes. "How should I bear to live if I had kissed you? As it is, there will come a time, perhaps, when I can forget how we have passed these weeks here together. Pardon! It is long past the hour for my second glass."

She turned with a careless bow, and went back to the Cure Garden, and Istvan Varnay followed the path on which his wife and her dog had preceded him.

IV.

THAT night, when Gladys Eyre went early to her room, she found a letter on her table. She knew well enough from whom it came, though she had never seen Istvan Varnay's handwriting before. He showed, at least, that he knew how to put himself on paper. He was really eloquent about his love,—the love of four silent years ago in London, the love that had taken on new strength in these weeks at Kissingen. And then he said:—

“What did I mean to do? What should I have done, if she had not come so unexpectedly? For you must know I did not expect her. The same physician that sent me here sent her to Homburg, and I fancied she was safe enough there for three weeks to come. God knows what freak brought her here. What if she had not come? Honestly, I do not know. I know no more than you. Most likely I should have told you all,—how I loved you and how I was bound; or perhaps I should have turned coward, and gone away in silence as before. I read your scorn of me plainly enough in your eyes this morning. Well, that is so much the better for you. But one thing you shall know. I say it to you now, over and over; and I will say it to you when we are both ghosts, if we meet in some other world. I love you—you—you, and no one else on earth or in heaven. However much you scorn or hate me, you cannot help it that I love you.”

Gladys read the letter through, and then her lips curled in a scornful smile.

“What fine rhodomontade,” she said. “The man

would make a good actor, for he really believes in himself."

Then she took the letter and held it in the flame of her candle till it was burned to ashes. And then, being only a woman, she cried — for Robert Otis. At least, she said to herself that she was crying for Robert Otis; and who should know if not she?

Suddenly, like some witch-invoked vision, the face of the astrologer seemed to rise before her, and to look at her with that look which had seemed to her the look of destiny. Clearly, as on that March day in Boston, she heard him say, —

"You will cross the sea. You go to meet your fate. You will hold in your hand a cup of joy, and a woman will take it from you. Still, your fate will be in your own hands. You can defy even the stars if you will."

It was true that she had crossed the sea, that she had been happy, and that a woman had dashed her cup of joy from her lips. But her fate, — how was it in her own hands? What was it in her power to say but good-by. Was ever woman more helpless than she? She leaned from the window. The stars, those "common people of the skies," looked down on her. The night seemed to throb with passionate silence.

Then suddenly the music to which they were dancing over in the Cur-saal pulsed out loud and clear. The ball was not yet over. People were still astir. Lamps gleamed out here and there, but a soft dusk overspread the moonless world. The breath of roses

stole up from the garden. Faint murmurs arose from the thicket, as if things that love the dark were whispering together.

A sudden longing seized her to go down into the heart of the night, to have room, as she said to herself, in which to breathe. She took a lace scarf and threw it over her head, and sped swiftly down the stairs, across the Cure Garden and out on the little bridge that crosses the Saal on the way to the Casino. She saw the stars mirrored in the water. She felt the soft wind caress her hot face. Then suddenly she knew that she was not alone. Istvan Varnay stood on the bridge beside her.

"I *willed* you to come," he said. "I was determined to see you once more. We go away to-morrow. Madam is restless. She is tired of Kissingen already. She says the air does not agree with her dog. You scorn me too much even to hate me. If you loved me, and did not scorn me, do you know what I should say to you?"

A sudden impulse came over Gladys to test him, to listen to him, to know him thoroughly — the best and the worst of him. She said in tones so subtle, so impassioned they might almost have been the voice of the night, —

"And if I did not scorn you, but only scorned my own folly in caring for you so much, what then would you say?"

"This: that I know at last that nothing is of any real consequence to me but your love; that the thought

of parting with you is more bitter than death. I want you — you. I am ready to give up all the rest of the world for your sake. If I thought you cared for me, I should say, ‘Let madam and her dog go to-morrow; let us go to-night. A train leaves in an hour.’ Four years ago I loved you and I left you. Now I love you, and I will not leave you unless you send me. I am yours, and I will do your will. Have mercy upon me!”

“Yes, I will have mercy upon you,” she answered very sweetly, very tenderly.

At that he stretched out his eager hands, but they failed to find hers.

“Yes,” she said again, “I will have mercy upon you. I will save you the alliance and the estate that seemed worth so much to you four years ago. I will guard your honor, such as it is, from the world’s censure. You shall go to-morrow with madam and her dog, and I — It is late, my friend, and I will go in, by your leave. This is good-by, — good-by, please Heaven, for always.”

And with no further word she turned from Istvan Varnay and walked with unfaltering steps back to the Cure Garden, and across it, and in a moment more she was in her own room. She had held her fate in her hand, and had settled it as she freely chose.

Had she ever really loved Istvan Varnay, or had it been but a midsummer madness? Could she ever really have cared for this man, who had left her with-

out a word when he was free; who, when bound, would have been ready to forsake honor and duty as lightly as he had once left her, — ready to ruin her life and his own? It seemed to her that in an hour the face of the world was changed. If she had ever loved him, the love was as dead now as the world that had died before the flood. But for this last revelation of himself she might have gone on regretting him, — who knew? Now she was safe even from his memory, since she scorned him with the very scorn of scorn. What temptation could ever have brought Robert Otis so low? Then a sudden thought smote her like a blow. Could she ever feel herself worthy of Robert Otis again?

Sometimes Nature is kind,' and that night she was kind to Gladys. She sent her merciful sleep, born of intense weariness, and the girl arose next morning refreshed and mistress of herself. When she went down for her early Racoczy water, she met Madam Varnay in the hall. The Hungarian spoke amiably.

"We go," she said, "in half an hour. See, Buda has a new ribbon. She is in her toilet of voyage." And a careless laugh showed her bright flashing teeth.

"Good-by," Gladys answered cheerfully. "I am so very glad to have seen you;" and the words were as true as truth itself.

V.

Six weeks after that, Aunt Mehitable and her niece were on the Atlantic, homeward bound. Gladys had still carried on by postal cards her correspondence with Mr. Otis, of Boston; but she had thought about him very much in these last few weeks. One question haunted her with a stern and implacable persistence, "Should she, must she tell Robert Otis the whole truth?"

She had begun to feel something much more like love for him than she had ever experienced before. At the least, it was an esteem so admiring and so perfect that it might easily have done duty for love; and she shrank from displacing herself from the heights to which his homage had raised her. She resolved to leave her course to be determined by time and chance, though down underneath all sophistries she knew that she would never be happy or at rest until all was told.

It was the first day of October when the "Scythia" arrived at her pier; and the first face Gladys saw was that of Robert Otis. She took his arm somewhat proudly. She began to think that she had never before quite realized how fine-looking a fellow he was, with his manly height, his strong well-knit figure, his frank and kindly blue eyes, a gentleman through and through.

But somehow his manner seemed a little cool. He saw her luggage and Aunt Mehitable's through the

custom-house with equal helpfulness. Then he put them both into a waiting carriage, and said cordially, "I'll give you time to rest, and look you up this evening."

As Gladys drove over the ferry she was vexing her soul with questions. What did Robert's manner mean? What if he did not really care much about her after all, and it was only because of some dogged spirit of perseverance in him that he had gone on asking her to marry him year after year? He looked capable of just that. Her father and mother had not yet returned from a Western journey, and she was to go home with Aunt Mehitable.

When the bell rang that evening she felt her pulse quicken as it had not been wont to do in old times at the coming of Robert Otis. Aunt Mehitable considerably found herself too tired by the voyage to sit up, and Gladys was alone in the great old drawing-room, with only the painted faces of generations of her ancestors looking down on her from the walls. A little autumn fire of fragrant boughs smouldered and snapped in the fireplace; a lamp with crimson shade stood on the table.

It was in consequence of this lamp-shade, perhaps, that Gladys seemed to blush as Mr. Otis came cheerfully in. She went forward and gave him her hands. He took them with a kind pressure, and then let them go as if he had no further use for them. He took no advantage of his position to kiss the lips that were so temptingly near him. He sat down in a comfortable

chair, in front of the fire, and not unreasonably near the lady.

"Well, Gladys, who is he?" was his first half-smiling question.

"Who is who?"

"He! The man who has stolen, or perhaps fairly won, your heart away from me?"

"Robert — who — what — what on earth do you mean?"

"Only that a girl who cares for her promised husband even as little as I thought you cared for me when we parted does not choose to write to him on postal cards. I knew quite well that you were going through some experience that made you unwilling to write to me. You shall do as you please about telling me. I will never force your confidence; only perhaps it will be better for both of us if you understand that I am quite capable of being your best friend."

"I think I would rather tell you," Gladys said slowly; and then she added eagerly, "Yes, I am sure I would. I want you to know."

And then came the entire story, without prevarication or reserve, from the London season of four years ago to every little detail of those weeks at Kissingen. A close watcher might have read in Robert Otis's face the whole effect of the tale upon him, — his jealousy, his pain, his final and confident triumph. "I am glad, at least, that the man never kissed you," he said very quietly, when all the tale had been told. "I would not have liked him to have that to remember."

Gladys looked at him in surprise.

"What do you mean to do?" she asked.

"I? Oh, I mean to be as nice to you as I can, and try my luck with you again another year. I am used to that, you know."

"And you are sure you will really want me after all I have told you?"

"Yes. I'm not likely to change about wanting you. Only I'd rather you loved me before we are married, you know."

Gladys drew very near him. There was a warm glint in her eyes, — a reflection from the fire perhaps. It seemed to Mr. Otis, however, that she was looking at him as he had never seen her look before.

"What," she whispered, "if I would rather not wait till next year? What if I have found out that I love you now?"

JOHN JAY'S LONG JOURNEY.

SHALL I begin by painting John Jay's portrait? I am sure that no one else ever painted it. The Royal Academicians did not know him, nor was he handsome or distinguished enough to be a temptation to their brushes. He had not made mark enough on his time to get himself caricatured in the penny newspapers. He had no money to waste on photographs, so not even the sun had made a picture of him. Yet John Jay was far from a bad-looking fellow.

He was about five feet ten inches in height, with a well-knit figure. The one beauty of his face was his eyes, — great brown faithful eyes, with something such a look in them as you may have seen in those of a high-bred, honorable dog, quite above the small deceptions and subterfuges of the average human being. He had brown hair, straight and smooth, and a brown mustache. His features were tolerably regular, but in no wise striking, except in their expression. He wore the look of an habitual dreamer. His world was not at all the world of the people he lived among. Other suns shone on it and other moons; and the dreams he dreamed and the hopes he hoped were all his own.

Nature had done her best to make him a poet, but his necessities had made him a journalist. He was a hard-working, poorly-paid literary hack, living in a hand-to-mouth fashion that promised little security for his future, and gave him no time to do the work which would really have expressed his own individuality. His voice was singularly musical, but low, and his utterance was slightly hesitating, as if he came out of a dream to speak to you.

And now I have painted his portrait as you might have seen him the day before Christmas, in 18 —, could you have looked in at a second-story front window in a queer old house in the Euston road in busy London. I said a queer old house, but the house was not so queer as its inmates. People came and went at all hours of the day and night in this dingy house. The landlady was a mystery. She had corkscrew curls on each side of her sallow face, framing it in an ebon frame; she wore skimpy black gowns. Her voice was that of a querulous woman, but her upper lip bore a mustache a young Oxonian might have coveted, and her stride as she marched down the Euston road was that of a grenadier. Looking at her sometimes, John Jay used to quote, in that low gentle voice of his :

“ They are neither man nor woman ;
They are neither ghost nor human ;
They are ghouls, ghouls, ghouls.”

And a ghoul Mrs. Langley might have been for any interest she showed as to the welfare of her lodgers.

They paid their money ; she opened her doors, — there the compact ended.

It was a good-sized house ; and as no one had more than a single room, and on the upper stories several people huddled into the same room, it had many occupants, who came in, some of them, at unholy hours, and took other people's day for their night. There were only two of them all with whom John Jay had any acquaintance. One was a little dressmaker, Miss Renfrew by name, — a slight, busy little person, who occupied the first-story front just under John Jay's room, and whose open door our journalist used to pass so often that he had grown to feel acquainted with her, and frequently stopped to bid her good-day. She was what they call an "art dressmaker," though the dingy old house in Euston road was the last place, you would have thought, in which an "art dressmaker" would have been likely to find herself or be found by others.

John Jay's second acquaintance was a less reputable one. His name was "Dan," — the only name any one knew him by, — and he was a cobbler, and a drunken cobbler at that. Unlike Mr. Jay and Miss Renfrew, he seemed fitly to belong to the inodorous old house, with its smell of mould blended with bad tobacco, its walls which were always perspiring an unhealthy dampness, and its uncertain floors, on which you stepped cautiously, with an uneasy doubt as to how long they would hold together.

Tap, tap, tap, went Dan's busy hammer all day

long over John Jay's head; but with the nightfall Cobbler Dan, like other creatures of the night, used to steal out of doors and prowling round, Heaven knows where. Often enough John Jay, working late over some article, would hear him stumbling upstairs; and though he had a hearty contempt for the drunken little man he was yet kind-hearted enough to listen to see if the cobbler got safely to his own door. Now and again, when the toper had taken a little more than usual, and Jay heard him fall on the stairs, he would go out and pick him up and see him into his room. Drunken Dan had a lively sense of gratitude for these favors, and on the strength of this emotion considered himself a friend of John Jay's.

I forgot the children. They belonged in some way to the house, though nobody ever quite knew who owned them; but they were always there. They were three in number, — two boys and a little girl who seemed to have stopped growing when she was not more than a baby, and yet to be preternaturally old and wise. It spoke well for John Jay's heart that he was always good to these children, and when he had hardly money enough to keep his scanty fire alight, would bring them home, now some apples, now a bag of taffy, or a paper with pictures in it; and they were grateful too, so that after all John Jay was not quite friendless on the day before Christmas, 18 —, though he said to himself that he had not a friend in the world.

It takes a holiday — Christmas, New Year's, a birth-

day—to emphasize a man's loneliness. On ordinary days John Jay worked so busily that he hardly had time to pity himself, but just of late he had had very little to do, and his purse was almost empty, save for one ten-pound note, with which he never parted; and the fire on his hearth was low. The afternoon was dark with fog, and it seemed to him that the ghosts jeered at him. We all have our ghosts,—those of us who are past our youth,—and at Christmas time, above all, they will have speech with us. They used to keep merry Christmases with us in the old days when Christmas was merry, and now they come back and we share our Christmas dainties with them against our will.

Only John Jay had no Christmas dainties to share. He sat there in the foggy afternoon and watched the flickering firelight; and the ghosts came,—father, mother, sister, brother, all of them dear once, all of them dead now. And then in the firelight he saw another vision,—the fairest face, as he thought, in the whole wide world. There was no place which the real Miss Florence Seyton would be less likely to enter than this second-story room in the dingy old house in the Euston road, yet his fancy summoned her, and the firelight shimmered on her perfect form, clad in lustrous silk, on her golden hair, and the girlish beauty of her face, at once so proud and so tender.

There was a curious feeling in John Jay's head, as if some chord there had snapped, and a kind of vagueness possessed his thoughts, so that what was dream

and what was reality he hardly knew. He had eaten very little of late, because of that emptiness of his purse of which I have spoken ; and this may have had something to do with the uncertainty that pervaded his ideas. He saw Florence Seyton as plainly as he saw the flickering fire near which she stood.

"Florence," he said suddenly. He had never called her thus by her name in reality, and even the vision seemed to resent it, for suddenly it faded, and he was alone in the damp old room, with the smoky fire and the tireless mouse gnawing at the wainscot.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon. He got up and looked down into the crowded, noisy street. Everybody was so heartlessly alive down there. School-boys were coming home for the holidays. Carts piled with Christmas hampers from country cousins were tearing along on their way from the Euston station. Bustling people on foot hurried by, their arms full of Christmas purchases.

"How happy they all look!" he said to himself. "I'll go out and hurry along with the rest."

He changed his coat. The frock-coat he put on was threadbare, but it offered a certain tribute to the proprieties of life ; and John Jay was by no means an ill-looking man as he went down the stair and passed the open door of Miss Renfrew. He had taken his purse, with all the money he had left in it, and he was bent on making a purchase or two.

The twilight had darkened while he made his preparations to go out. The street lamps winked in the

fog. The wind drove the cold sleet in his face, and the noises of the crowded street seemed to deafen him. He pressed on to the Gower-Street station and took a ticket to South Kensington.

"Where are you going, my man?" he said to himself; but all the same he knew very well where he was going. He got out of the train at the South-Kensington station and walked to a familiar house in a familiar square, — a large, stately house, glowing with many lights. It was the Seyton mansion, the only grand house in London to which he had ever been welcomed. He owed his welcome there to some articles he had written for an influential journal on a matter which the Hon. Rex Seyton had much at heart. Mr. Seyton, having read and liked the articles, sought out the author and asked him now and again to his house.

I said in the beginning that Nature had made John Jay a poet. It is much the same perhaps as saying that Nature had made him a madman. At least there could have been no madder thing than his falling desperately in love with Miss Florence Seyton. He might as well have set his heart on the morning star, for any good it would do him. But you may be sure that Miss Seyton was quite aware of his devotion and enjoyed it. I wonder if the candle takes pleasure in burning the wings of the moth?

As John Jay walked toward the Seyton mansion a purpose formed itself in his mind, if indeed his mind were sane enough to harbor any real purposes at all. He said to himself, —

"If I am admitted to see her to-night, I will take it as an omen of good, and I will live on, and struggle. If not—" But he did not finish the sentence, even to himself. As he drew near, he could see her shadow on a blind of an upper room. She was pinning something in her hair, he fancied, — a deep-hearted crimson rose perhaps, like one he remembered. He watched the shadow for a little while. Then he rang the bell.

"Are the ladies at home?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; but they can see no one to-night. They are dressing for a dinner-party, to which they must go early; it is so far away."

Mr. John Jay gave his card to the man who had thus dashed his last hope to the ground, and turned away; and the sleet, grown stronger, buffeted him in the face, and the lights winked their derision at him as he hurried back to the South-Kensington station. When he reached his old haunts on the Euston road, he made his purchases.

"I will dine to-night," he said to himself, "though I sup among the shades;" and he bought at an eating-house a paper of cold meat. Then he visited a toy-shop, and then he saw in a window a bunch of violets and went in for it. Thus laden, he made his way home. The little dressmaker's door was open as usual, and he paused in front of it. Her fire was bright, and she knelt before it, toasting a muffin. For the first time he noticed that she had golden hair, of just the same shade as that which crowned the proud little head of Florence Seyton. She too was very pretty

in her way, though he had scarcely noticed that either, in the busy days gone by when his heart and his hands had both been so full.

"It's very good of you," he said, "to keep your door open. You and your fire make the house cheerful."

"I'm afraid I don't do it from any such motive," she answered, looking up from her toasting with a smile. "The chimney smokes horribly the moment the door is shut, so I keep it open in self-defence."

"All the same you *do* make it pleasanter for the rest of us, and I brought you these violets by way of saying thank you."

Miss Renfrew sprang up eagerly. She loved flowers with all her heart, and, above all flowers, violets.

"Oh, thank you!" she cried, "and I do hope you'll have a merry Christmas. Shall you stay here?"

"No; I am going away."

"A long way?"

"Yes, a good distance."

"To a pleasant place?"

"I hope so. I have never been there. I believe it is very quiet."

"And you go in the morning?"

"No, to-night. I have my preparations to make, so good-night, and merry Christmas!"

"To-night? I hope you'll have a pleasant journey, but I wish it were a better night."

"I shall not mind the night, once that I am on the road. Good-by."

And John Jay went on, upstairs, and the little dressmaker sighed as she turned back to her toasting. She would fain have asked him to share her muffins, but she feared he had a soul above them and her.

The journalist went into his room, where the fire he had left burned ill-naturedly, and he closed and locked the door behind him. He had eaten nothing since morning, and he made way with his cold meat, washing it down with a bottle of thin ale. Then he proceeded to inspect his other purchases. He cut the string of his brown-paper parcel and produced, first of all, a wooden box, from which he extracted a toy village. There were the farm-house, the trees, the smaller houses, the sheep, with their stiff tails, and the sheep-dog to keep them in order, and there were the farmer and the farmer's wife, dressed just as they had been in his own boyhood.

Next he drew forth a box of tin soldiers, fragile but fierce, and with a smell of fresh paint that seemed to come to him all the way down from the far-off years when he and his dead brother and sister played together. Poor, pretty little Min! How green the grass was on her grave when he saw it last! He had bought for the mummy of a girl downstairs just such a doll as Min used to play with, and this doll was the last thing he took from the brown-paper parcel. How carefully he set all these things out, arranging them to the best advantage, and meanwhile awakening in his heart all sorts of haphazard old memories, as

a musician striking chords at random awakens echoes of old songs.

When he had finished the arrangement of the toys, he went to a little box, which he unlocked, and drew therefrom three letters and a faded rose. A deep-hearted, crimson rose it was, and oh, how full of sweetness on the night when it fell from Florence Seyton's hair, and she had smiled as he picked it up and audaciously fastened it in his own button-hole. The three letters were from her. The first one said :—

DEAR MR. JAY, — Mamma wants to know if you will drop in to afternoon tea next Friday. She would write herself, but she has a headache. Yours sincerely,

FLORENCE SEYTON.

The next was a shade warmer in style :—

MY DEAR MR. JAY, — How good you were to remember I wanted to see those books, and take so much trouble just to please me! Thank you so much. Your cordial friend,

FLORENCE SEYTON.

And the third was such a note as a real friend might write :—

MY DEAR MR. JAY, — We are going out of town. Come and say good-by on Saturday afternoon, and promise to miss us when we are far away.

FLORENCE.

And that was all. For a red rose and three letters he had thrown his life away. He went to say good-by, that Saturday in the late August, and after all he had scarcely been able to say a word to Miss Seyton, so surrounded had she been by others. And he had never heard from her since. She had returned from

out of town and made him no sign, and all he had seen of her was her shadow on the blind in the sleety Christmas Eve. He kissed the letters, one by one, with a kiss as passionate, as despairing as one presses on the lips of the dying, and then threw them into the fire. Then he took the red rose and pressed that to his lips in its turn, but that he did not burn. He laid that upon his heart.

He took his ten pounds from his otherwise empty purse and put it into an envelope, and on the envelope he wrote, —

“The money is for my funeral. The toys are for the children.”

And then he carefully excluded all the outer air. He stopped the cracks about the door and the windows and lit something in a pan, and then he knelt and said a prayer, only these words, —

“If I am wrong, may God, who knows my heart and my life, forgive my sin and lead me into rest!”

And then he threw himself upon his bed and folded his arms with a long sigh, as of one tired with the day's work, who waits for sleep; and lying there in his damp clothes, strange visions kept him company. First it was Min and Ned — his sister and brother of long ago — who came out of their graves to pass with him this Christmas Eve; and Min said, “See, he's asleep;” and Ned answered, “No, he's only shamming.” But Min still thought he slept, and very softly she sang a lullaby to her doll.

Then it was his mother, with her sad, tender gray eyes, who came in and said gently, "Ah, poor fellow, he's asleep!" and bent over him, in mother fashion, and kissed his forehead, and then went out of the room as noiselessly as a shadow.

And then, oh, joy of joys! *she* came, — the lady of his love, — even *she*, who held his thoughts waking and his dreams sleeping, and from whom his soul was never parted, — *she* was there in his lonely, barren room. He heard the sweep of her dress across the uncertain floor and the tread of her beloved feet.

"I have come," she said, bending over him gently and giving him her hands to hold, — "I have come to comfort you. I must not love you; I did not mean to make you love me. Oh, my dear, my dear! I am so sorry for you, so sorry!"

And she knelt beside him in this waking vision and lifted his head, which throbbed so strangely, to her breast, and the glory of her golden hair caught the firelight, and he felt her heart beat beneath his head, and then — was it her tears that fell on his face a gentle rain?

It was almost midnight when Dan, the cobbler, came stumbling home, less unsteadily than usual, however, for two bottles of whiskey came with him. One was his Christmas treat to himself, and the other he designed as a Christmas gift to John Jay. What could he give better than what he himself liked best in the world? And he could not let Christmas go by without making some sign of gratitude for the quiet kindness

that had watched over his uncertain steps so many midnights. He had even kept himself very reasonably sober that he might be in good form for the presentation ceremony.

As he went by the little dressmaker's room he noticed that she was still up and sitting before her fire, though it was long past the hour at which she was accustomed to put out her light. Cobbler Dan glanced in at the lonely little figure as he went by, but he did **not speak**. He went on up to his own room, left there one bottle of whiskey and his battered hat, and came down again to bring his offering to John Jay. He knocked on the door, but there was no answer. He shook it violently; still no response. Then downstairs he went, and stood in Miss Renfrew's still open door.

"If your door's been open all along, perhaps you know whether Mr. Jay is gone out?"

The little dressmaker did not think it necessary to confess that she had kept her door open on purpose to see John Jay when he went out, and have one more good-by before he started on his journey. She only said that she was quite sure he had not gone out, for he had looked in on his way upstairs, and told her that he was going off that night on a long journey, and she had been sitting ever since where she must have seen him if he had passed by.

"Then he can't have gone to sleep," cried Cobbler Dan, "if he's bound for a journey!" And with that he tore upstairs again, and made noise enough on

John Jay's door to awake the seven sleepers, one and all. But there came no response ; and then Miss Renfrew stole up and stood beside him, her face white with terror. An awful foreboding had seized her. Was the long journey to be a very long journey indeed, — too long for any man to make twice?

“Break the door open ; oh, for pity's sake, *push!*” she cried ; and she pressed against it with all her poor little might. Then Cobbler Dan set his strong shoulder against it also and burst it in ; and the room was full of the deadly fumes of burning charcoal. Dan dashed across it and threw open the window. Then he and Miss Renfrew glanced around them. They saw the toys so carefully arranged and the envelope with the few words written on it ; and they saw John Jay, with his head at rest upon the pillows of his bed and his hands folded upon his breast. But *they* could not see the visions that kept him company, — the children that came out of the past and out of their graves to play with him ; the sad-eyed mother, the radiant golden head of the latest comer, — all these companions of his journey, of such substance as dreams are made of, were invisible to them, and soon they had put them all to flight. Was it in cruelty or in mercy that they brought John Jay back from his long journey?

But when he opened his eyes again, he gazed around him as one who knows not where he is ; and he babbled words to which the two who watched beside him could attach no meaning. In the morning the doctor came,

and his verdict was "brain fever;" and he said "the charcoal business," as he called it, was part of the disease. No man in his right mind ever dreamed of suicide.

It was a hard fight, after all, for the man's life. Miss Renfrew brought her work upstairs and watched over him all day, and Cobbler Dan kept himself as sober as a town clock, and watched over him all night; and between them they brought him through at last. All through his illness he called Miss Renfrew "Florence." Oddly enough this was really her name, and though she wondered how he possibly could have found it out, she never once dreamed that it was to another Florence that he addressed his passionate cries of love and gratitude and despair. She had grown to love him very dearly in these long days when it seemed to her that his life hung on the frailest thread.

"He loves me too," she would say to herself, "now that he is mad. Will he love me when he is sane again?"

That time came at last. It was on one of those suspiciously mild days in February, when winter masquerades as spring, that John Jay came back to the consciousness of his own existence. He looked with a sort of pathetic surprise at his thin hands.

"Birds' claws, are n't they?" he said, holding them up to the light. "How long have I been ill, Miss Renfrew?"

"Six weeks; ever since Christmas Eve."

The hot blood rushed to John Jay's pale face. Sud-

denly he remembered the last act of his Christmas Eve,—the long journey he had meant to take. He put out a thin hand, and Florence Renfrew took it in both her own.

“*You saved me,*” he said; “I know it was you.”

“No, it was not I; it was Dan. He came to bring you a bottle of whiskey. He pounded on your door, and when he could not make you hear, he broke it in; and then I came, and then you had brain fever.”

“And *you* nursed me?”

“Dan and I. He took the nights and I took the days, and he has kept as sober as a judge.”

“God in heaven bless you both!” John Jay said solemnly; and then he turned his face to the wall, and who knows what he said or to whom he cried?

Two days afterward he begged to see all the letters that had accumulated during his absence. They were not numerous,—a few requests for copy, a tailor’s circular, a column of proof of the last work he did before his illness, and a large envelope which proved to contain an invitation from Mr. and Mrs. Rex Seyton to the wedding of their daughter Florence. Over this last he lingered a little grimly; then he put it into Miss Renfrew’s hands.

“*She* was all of it,” he said with a smile that curved his lips, but did not get as far as his eyes.

“All of what?”

“Charcoal, brain fever,—all of it. She was as far out of my reach as the full moon from the child that cries for it; and yet I loved her—desperately. Do

you know I've thought you were she all these weeks past? Have n't I called you Florence?"

"Yes," said the little dressmaker, and she forced her quivering lips to smile, and turned her eyes away, — "yes, but Florence is my name, and I thought you had found it out somehow."

Two weeks after that John Jay had got downstairs; and he was sitting by Miss Renfrew's fire, and she was toasting muffins, just as she had been on Christmas Eve, — only this time the muffins were for John, and he professed himself as hungry as a hunter.

When he had eaten his fill, she still sat on the low stool before the fender, and the firelight glowed on her gleaming, golden hair. John Jay put out his hand and touched it.

"It is pretty hair, Florence, — as pretty as hers was, and the same wild roses come and go in your cheeks. And your voice is as soft as hers; and your heart, — ah! I think your heart has a place for me in it, and hers never had. I believe it was you whom I loved all the time; and I thought it was she, because I did not know. Will you be content with my poor man's lot and love back my love, you best, last Florence?"

The gentle eyes that looked up to him in the firelight's glow filled with tears, and the low voice said, —

"Do you want me, really? I have loved you from the first. But oh, don't make a mistake! For pity's sake, do not give me your life because you think I have saved it!"

Two firm hands clasped hers then, and John Jay's honest, doglike eyes looked into hers steadily.

"No," he said; "I think my fever burned that old foolish unreturned love to white ashes. I am all and always yours, if you will have me."

And after all, John Jay made a long journey; for he brought his wife across the seas to America, and there was room for them here, and to-day John Jay is managing editor of a certain New York daily newspaper. Can you guess which?

THE PERILS OF A STUDIO.

HE was a weak young man, this Paul Rutledge, to whom I am about to introduce you. Was he weak, I wonder, because he was an artist, or was he an artist because he was weak, or had the art and the weakness no connection whatever? I do not mean, when I call him weak, that he could not lift a reasonably heavy weight, for there was more strength than one would have at first fancied in his tall, slight, but really muscular figure. Paul Rutledge's weakness was not of the body, but of the mind,—in the easily-moved, pleasure-loving temperament which could not say "no;" the imagination so prone to transfigure very common clay into the stately shapes of gods and goddesses.

He was not exactly handsome; his chin was not strong enough for that, and his nose a little too short. But he had brown eyes, warm with the hot life that throbbed in his veins; cheeks that blushed like a girl's; lips that were too full for a man, and which sought pleasure as a bee seeks honey. There was something in him that appealed to the maternal side of

every woman who cared for him at all, made her feel that she must look out for his interests, and keep him from wasting his time and his money; from becoming the prey of the designing, the companion of fools and spendthrifts.

It may have been because the maternal element was more than usually strong in Margaret Ellwood that she loved him better than any one else had ever done. She was a widow when she met him first, and had just passed her thirtieth birthday; while Paul Rutledge at twenty-five was an old man, as he told her, having loved and suffered, and given up hope and desire. Mrs. Ellwood, on the other hand, felt hope and desire very young in her, and very much alive.

She had married, when she was scarcely eighteen, a man much older than herself, and utterly unsuited to her, who had won her, Heaven knows how, — as so many girls are won, — before she understood her own nature or her own needs. In this ill-advised marriage, decorous and civil as the relations between husband and wife had always been, she had never known one day of real happiness; and in her secret soul she felt that the first evidence of good-will her destiny had ever shown her came when her husband was so considerate as to die, and leave her, at twenty-six, mistress of her own fate, and of a comfortable fortune. Four years passed after that auspicious event before she met Paul Rutledge. At first the sense of freedom had been joy enough; but soon hope had begun to flutter in her heart like a caged bird, and she thrilled

with a keen, vague sense of all the possibilities of life, till her whole nature grew sensitive as a wind-harp, and ready to respond to a breath.

She was just thirty when she went abroad for the first time, and took up her residence for a season in London; and then and there she met Paul Rutledge. He was the fashion just then, and "everybody who was anybody" went to have a portrait painted by him. His mood, as I have said, was melancholy. The young woman on whom he had fixed his twenty-years'-old affections had been so unkind as to prefer another; and thereupon young Rutledge perceived himself in the character of a blighted man, with an immortal memory and an immortal grief, never again to be moved by woman of woman born to anything more than a languid admiration. He had kept to this rôle for five years very successfully, diversifying it, no doubt, by various friendships, so dangerously tender that the women who shared them might possibly have suffered had their hearts been more susceptible than his own. But luckily they had been of his own kind, and had sipped friendship as they sipped their maraschino after dinner, gently pleased, and no whit harmed thereby.

Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, Margaret Ellwood was of another species. I think there is something in the American air that makes women more emotional, more sensitive, more desperately in earnest than are their English cousins. At any rate the hero-worshipping faculty was strong in Margaret; and she

had not been long in London before she had begun to exercise it in Paul Rutledge's regard, and this even before she had seen him. It chanced that one of her letters of introduction was to a cousin of his, — a cousin proud of the young painter's gifts, admiring his art, and believing devoutly in his melancholy. The romance of his story lost nothing as the young English girl detailed it to her American listener.

"And where is he?" asked Mrs. Ellwood, somewhat eagerly. "Shall I see him? Does he go into society at all?"

"Oh, yes, he goes into society very much," Mabel Rutledge answered. "How could he live alone with his own gloom? But there *are* times — when *She* first comes up from her country-place and takes a house in London for the season, for instance — when he absolutely *cannot* bear things, and rushes away to some desolate sea-coast, or some nook among the mountains, to fight his old battle over again; and then he comes back colder and more scornful than ever. *She* came up to London three weeks ago, and then he went away to Normandy; but he'll be back next week. You'll be sure to see him everywhere; but what I want is that you should let him paint your portrait. You are rich, are n't you?"

The question was asked with a charming simplicity, and Mrs. Ellwood answered it as frankly.

"No; not rich. I have five thousand dollars a year, — a thousand pounds, as you would say; and I have saved a good deal of my income for the last two or

three years, so I could afford my portrait well enough, if there were anything about me worth painting."

Margaret was vaguely excited by Miss Rutledge's proposition. For Paul Rutledge she had conceived a rather romantic admiration. To have been faithful to the memory of a dead love who had loved him, — that would have been fine, no doubt; but how much finer to be faithful to love itself; to have met *the one woman* and loved her for life quite independently of return; to love her thus forever "with the love that was his doom!"

She adored his pictures too. Harsh critics found fault with his drawing; and the savage "Saturday" had pronounced his "greenery-yellery" flesh-tints suitable, perhaps, for ghosts and mermaids, but quite out of keeping with the well-fed, well-dressed young women of the nineteenth century who flocked to him to have their portraits painted because he was the fashion. Margaret adored his pictures, flesh-tints and all. If they did not look like the women of to-day, so much the worse, then, for the women of to-day. They looked like daughters of the gods, — "divinely tall and most divinely fair," — dwellers in "the land that is west of the sun and east of the moon." What, alas! had she in common with their mystic loveliness? What was there in her that deserved so to be made immortal?

She went to the glass and studied herself carefully. She saw a woman looking far younger than her thirty years, because of the youth of her unstirred, untired

heart, — a woman of full, rich contours, with face not regular of feature, but with charm enough to make up for all such lacks in the clear eyes, now blue, now gray, and speaking every thought before her lips did ; in the swiftly-changing color, the firm chin, the mouth in which sculptors and lovers might alike delight. She herself, however, felt a keen discontent as she studied herself in the glass. Most unlike was she to the pictures Paul Rutledge loved to paint. Her healthy color was far enough from their clear pallor ; her warm brown rebellious hair could never fall heavily as did their ebon locks ; the very light of life that danced in her eyes seemed commonplace beside the changeless, unspoken longing that looked out from under their heavy lids. Yet after she had studied herself for a while, Margaret began to think that at least it might be well — since her loveliness (what she had of it) was so mortal, evanescent, and changeful in its character — to “ arrest the remains of young and fair ; ” to treasure some record of her fleeting youth with which to confront the unkind satire of time, and prove her right to a past tense. Yes, she would have her portrait painted ; and Paul Rutledge, if he would so far condescend, should be the artist.

In another week he came back, and Mrs. Ellwood's first interview with him was in his own studio, whither his cousin Mabel had taken her. It seemed to Margaret a place of enchantment. Her keen sense of beauty thrilled within her as she stood in this treasure-house of old china and old armor, with tropical plants

growing in strange vases, and tropical birds that had escaped from open cage-doors, twittering and chattering and flashing in and out among the great dusky green leaves. On easels, here and there, rested pictures in every stage of completion; and Margaret had yielded herself completely to the unique charm of the place even before the artist came in from another room. A glance told her that the man befitted the *mise en scène*. He wore a velvet cap like the one in which Raphael painted his own portrait, and it suited his dark eyes and his warm bright color. A velvet blouse became him well; and with his slender well-kept hands, on one of which a mystic jewel gleamed, his slight tall figure, and his graceful carriage, he seemed to belong to his studio, as it belonged to him.

I half think that Margaret Ellwood loved him at first sight, though she did not understand it herself till long afterward. I say "long," yet I remember it was only ten days by actual reckoning; but during those ten days he had been painting her portrait, and she had spent an hour or two of every day in his studio, and there are days that hold many times twenty-four hours. She sat there on the tenth day, if I am to be exact as to my dates, with the long folds of the velvet dress in which Rutledge had chosen to paint her trailing upon the tiger-skin on which he had placed her stately chair of carved oak, black with time.

He had been working at some of the drapery, and Margaret had been talking, until he silenced her with —

"You will keep your lips closed now, please ; I want to paint your mouth."

Then for a few moments he worked in silence, and then suddenly he said, "You have overturned my whole scheme of life. I have learned from you that I have been an impostor."

"You !" she cried, thinking for the moment that he referred to his art.

"Pardon ! I am painting your lips now," he said coolly. "Yes, you have made me know myself for the sham I am. I thought, till I met you, that I *had* loved — once, and for always. I had meant to be faithful to this love to the end ; to deserve something of fate by showing myself the one constant man in a generation. I had vaunted myself on this. I fear I had posed a little, and now —"

Margaret Ellwood's lips kept the silence he had enforced ; but her eyes — those eyes which always spoke before her lips did — answered his words with a question, "And now?"

"And now," he went on, "I know that the old love was *not* love ; it was a boy's dream, an artist's worship of beauty, the love of Love, if you like, but *not* of that woman. I know now, for I love you, Margaret. The world would say you were unsuited for me, perhaps, — you, a widow, an American, older than I, if we reckon by years, and a thousand times too sweet and noble and good for me ; you, — Margaret !"

He spoke her name as if that one word summed up all womanhood for him, and then he laid down his

brush and knelt beside her; and then suddenly Margaret was aware that for the first time in her life she herself loved also. It seemed to her for a moment that the great wave of joy that flooded her heart would break it for very rapture, and she put her warm strong arms about his neck and drew down his head so that his eyes should not read her face, and held it for a moment close to the heart which, it seemed to her, had just then been born.

"Do you love me, then?" he asked at last.

"Yes," she said simply; "I think I had begun to love you before I even saw you. Yes, I love you."

The quiet words, strong with the strength of her soul, thrilled him as more vehement vows would not have done. He knew, once for all, in that moment, that he held her heart in his hand — his.

I will spare you the history of the hours which Margaret spent during the next few weeks in that studio which had grown to be her paradise. The portrait stood still for a while upon the easel; then he began to work with new zeal, and with new power also.

Margaret hardly believed the tale of her own beauty as it smiled from his canvas; but indeed it seemed as if in some sudden wise she had taken on fresh loveliness. Her eyes were radiant; her smile, — ah! when a smile is so over-full of gladness does it not of itself prophesy sorrow? Dare we be spendthrifts in our joy and not expect the reprisals of fate? Well, at least Margaret Ellwood tasted happiness in that one golden

summer. She used to say that whatever might come afterward, she would bless Paul forever for those days. Nothing could take from her their memory. She had never known what love could be before. She had been blind; now she saw. No after-midnight could be so black that she would lose the light of the celestial vision.

After the London season was over they went away—he and she—in company with Mabel Rutledge and her mother. They heard the midnight sea sob out its longing against the shore, and saw the blue mist break from the mountain-tops when the sun kissed them at dawning. From soft green thickets they heard the night-birds praise the silver-shining of the moon, and by the glow-worm's light they saw each other's eyes.

When they went back to town in the autumn, Rutledge wished to be married at once, and Margaret felt in time to come that she had been wrong in not consenting to his wishes. I think she shrank somewhat from the realism of marriage, and longed to dwell a little longer in the land of faëry. She said she must go to America and arrange her affairs. She would settle her business, bid farewell to friends and native land, and return in the spring for their wedding. Once she told him—and this was on the very last day before they parted—that she thought it much better they should not marry in haste. She was older than he, she said,—older and more worldly-wise; at which speech he laughed and called her his girl-love, his child, the youngest person he ever knew.

"All the same," she said with sudden tears, born, it may be, of some unspoken presentiment, — "all the same, I must be sure before we marry that you know your own mind. You have broken from the tradition of your past; and I must know quite surely whether the present is any more real."

"Oh, my dear," he cried, in very passion of love and grief, "my beautiful, saving love; you who have brought me from death to life and given me a new heaven and a new earth, don't you know how I love you? Can't you *know* that you have spoiled me for all other women?"

"I *shall* know next May," she answered; and with the tears still in her eyes she bent her tender lips to him where he knelt beside her and kissed her.

His heart, it seemed to him, followed in her vessel's wake as she sailed away; and then presently he heard from her from the other side of the sea, and the routine of their ocean-parted lives began. She had only one thought, — how to bless and help him most. She visited friends and relatives as one who is about to leave home and native land forever. She arranged her business affairs. She lived in all things as utterly for Paul Rutledge as if he had been the one sole creature in the universe; and for a long time, remembering the earnestness of his parting vows, no shadow of fear of any change on his part ever crossed her heart. How *did* the first doubt arise? I think it was when she read a letter from her own cousin, Nell Mason, that she felt the first premonitory heart-chill, like the

little shiver that runs over us when some one is walking upon our grave.

The relation between Margaret and Nell had been a somewhat singular one always. They had been rivals since childhood, — if that can be rivalry in which only one takes part. Margaret was three years the elder; and she who had no sister had been as tender as a sister to her younger cousin. But Nell had envied Margaret her power to please; her success at school; even her husband, when he appeared on the scene; and, most of all, her freedom and her fortune, when he so considerably departed from the world. She had gained her bitter bread by teaching for a year or two, and was tired of it; and so she gladly accepted an opportunity to go to England for the winter with a family connection who wished to pass some months in the neighborhood of the British Museum, and wanted a companion.

It was the natural thing, of course, that Nell should have letters to the Rutledges. Margaret had given them with real pleasure, and without one thought of possible danger to her own happiness. What the special charm of Nell Mason was, one would have been puzzled to say; yet charm she had, and one that Paul Rutledge felt from the very first. She was like a poppy, he was wont to say to himself, — dark, vivid, and dangerous. In the beginning he used to talk with her of Margaret; and while Nell seemed always to praise her cousin, somehow after he had parted with her, Rutledge often found himself thinking of Marga-

ret discontentedly, — wishing she were as young and as impulsive as Nell ; wishing she had never been married ; vexing his soul somewhat because she was not (as Nell had taken such good care to impress upon him) “a foolish girl,” but a woman, for whom life held no unsolved mysteries.

I told you in the outset that Paul Rutledge was a weak man ; and you have seen already how far he had been from real self-knowledge when he had believed that the love he felt at twenty had exhausted his whole life's possibilities in that direction. He thought of this himself, and wondered if he had been equally mistaken when he had told Margaret that she had spoiled him for all other women.

Thus far had matters progressed in London when Nell Mason wrote the letter which chilled Margaret's hope and faith as with a sudden frost, albeit it seemed to be a letter of congratulation.

“You are indeed a happy dear,” Nell wrote artfully, “to be beloved by one whom every girl covets. You, Margaret, are surely Fate's darling. First she gives you freedom and riches, and then — Paul. I see a great deal of him, for he insisted on painting my portrait ; and he says he needs a great many sittings, for I am as unlike his usual subjects as a carnation is unlike a lily.”

This was all ; but somehow the air seemed chill to Margaret when she had read it. In the letters that still came from Paul by every steamer, she seemed to perceive a subtle change ; but she chided herself for

this, and tried to think it a morbid fancy. She could hardly expect him to say the very same things over and over forever; and surely words of love could no farther go than those he had already written her. She went on with her preparations, despite the secret misgiving at her heart, and took her passage for England in a steamer that sailed the first of May.

Meantime Nell Mason's portrait was progressing very slowly. Paul found it necessary to talk to her a great deal. She was more beautiful when he talked to her than at any other time. It seemed to need just that to call the warm glow into her cheeks, the strange fire into her eyes, — that lurid fire at which he was warming his faithless heart. Yet he had not said to her in so many words, "I love you." His eyes had said it often enough, no doubt, and hers had answered. His voice had lingered over her name like a caress, but he had not actually spoken the words which Mistress Nell had vowed in her soul that he *should* speak before she was done with him.

At last came a morning on which she went to the studio as usual, yet not quite as usual, for this morning's post had brought her a letter from Margaret, — a letter posted just a week before the steamer was to sail which should bring back to Paul Rutledge his betrothed. Verily, Nell's time was short. Now or never must she win the triumph which would be the sweetest cup life had ever held to her lips. She went to the studio with eyes and cheeks and heart all aglow with baleful fire. Rutledge was desperately sad. He

posed his sitter and painted for a time in silence; then quite abruptly he said, —

“I have news this morning. Margaret will be here in a week.”

“Ah!” and Nell smiled dangerously; “my portrait must be finished before then. She will give you no time for poor me. When the sun rises, the stars discreetly retire.”

Suddenly Rutledge threw down his brush and caught her from her chair and strained her to his heart until she fairly gasped.

“Are you *mad*?” she cried. “You are my cousin’s lover, — almost her husband.”

“No; a thousand times no! When Margaret went away, she told me I was to have the winter in which to find out if I had not made a mistake. She is just and generous; she will forgive me. We needs *must* love the loveliest when we see it. Oh Nell, Nell, I love you as I have never loved before! Let Margaret find us married when she comes. For God’s sake have pity on me! I love you so!”

The weakness of the man spoke in his words. Keen-eyed Nell smiled an evil smile.

“So you would be married,” she said to herself, “before Margaret comes, and have me to help you bear the brunt? *That* is your plan, my fine hero!” Then she said, aloud and demurely, —

“You frighten me! How mad you are! How wicked you are! Poor Margaret! Do you want to break her heart?”

"Her heart is too proud and too strong to break. She will not want me when she knows that I do not really love her. Mad I may be, and wicked I may be, but you have made me so; do you understand? I love you!"

There was a passion and a power in his look which would have frightened and compelled some women. Not so Nell. She played with him a little longer.

"Oh, no, you cannot mean what you say! Poor Margaret!" and as she spoke the name, her voice trembled, — supreme actress that she was, — as if her heart were breaking with love and pity.

"Margaret," he answered, and his own tone had caught a strain of sadness, — "Margaret is noble enough to forgive, and strong enough to live without any man. She is better off without me. Nell, I am waiting for your answer. Surely you love me. Will you be my wife before Margaret comes?"

"It would be very inconvenient," she said mockingly, "very. I am engaged to Sir Robert Seton; and I *could n't* marry two husbands, could I?"

Paul Rutledge withdrew the arms which had been so desperately straining her to his heart. He stood for a moment silently looking at her scornful, beautiful face. Then he said, "So you have been playing with my heart all this time; you have meant — nothing?"

"Yes, I have meant to put a little interest into your winter; to amuse myself; above all, to test your love for Margaret. I should not like my trustful cousin to be deceived."

“And I *loved* you!”

That was all he said, but the words dashed Nell's cup of triumph with bitterness. Did he scorn her, after all?

“Do not be too hard on me,” she implored, and again the ready tears rose to her lying eyes; “I *must* marry Sir Robert, but—I was not playing with you. If I have hurt you, I have not escaped scot-free myself,” and she put out both her hands in farewell. For a single minute he knelt beside her and held them crushed in his nervous grasp; then he threw them from him as if they burned him.

“God may forgive you,” he said; “I never will;” and he went out of the room and left Nell to tie on her bonnet and smooth its strings with nicest care, and smile at her vivid, brilliant self as she drew on her long gloves, and make her way into the busy London street on which the May sun shone.

When Margaret Ellwood reached Queenstown, she received two letters. The first was from her cousin Nell, and after a few commonplace words of greeting, it said,—

“I am sorry to tell you that my sittings for my portrait resulted rather disastrously. I tell you because I could not think it right to keep such a secret. Mr. Rutledge surprised and pained me by falling in love with me. Two days ago he knelt at my feet and raved of his love for me like a madman, and prayed me to marry him before you came. I cut his raptures short by telling him that I was engaged to marry Sir Robert Seton. I give him back to you, my dear, as good as new,—or nearly. I make no merit of the

gift, since I did not want him; but I advise you never to leave him to himself again. He is quite too susceptible to be trusted out of leading-strings."

The other letter was from Paul Rutledge himself, and it was brief:—

"Welcome! welcome! welcome! Come and heal and save me, my soul's love, and never, in God's name, leave me again, for I am too poor a creature to live without you."

"Too poor a creature!" — he who had been her king of men. This then was the end of all, — this the outcome of what she had believed Fate's special tenderness for her. Did she suffer? I am too trustworthy a confidante to unveil the tortures of a strong heart rent by so desperate an overthrow. Weak natures cannot measure such a pain. If any of you who read are of Margaret's kind, you will know what the next few hours were to her without words of mine.

At first she thought she would never see her faithless sweetheart again; and then came a desperate, irresistible yearning just to look upon his face once more, with clearer eyes, and divine, if she could, how she had chanced so to deceive herself in him. She might be healed of her pain, she said to herself, by once seeing him as he really was. That is a happy thought for one who would fain be cured of a misplaced love. *See* the object, and learn thus how little worth loving he is, and surely on the instant your heart will be made whole!

Two days afterward Margaret stood on the threshold of that studio where the first love of her life had

come to her. She had not telegraphed from Liverpool, as she would have done had all been well, and Rutledge had no means of knowing that she had arrived in London. Her heart-beats almost stifled her as she raised her hand to knock on the well-known door. Once this place had seemed to her as the very shrine of a god. Now she knew that her idol's feet were clay; and she shrank from entering his presence, even while she longed for it. Yet a moment more, and she was in the studio. Paul was alone. He sprang to meet her with a sudden cry of joy, —

“Oh, my one only love! Oh, my darling!”

Did he mean then to deceive her, — to hide his past faithlessness, to take her love as if it were his right? Was he, *even he*, so poor a creature as this? She could not bear to meet his eyes. She took from her pocket Nell's letter. “Read that, please,” she said quietly.

Paul Rutledge read it to the end.

“You have come to me, then, knowing all this?” he asked with a kind of desperate calmness. “Was it not enough for that accursed woman that she tempted me till I fell, but she must poison you against me, and try to take away my last chance of happiness?”

“It is all true, then?” Margaret asked, still very quietly.

“Yes, it's true enough; only it was madness and not love that I felt for her.”

“I think a woman might like better to inspire such madness than what you call your love,” Margaret said; “I think *I* would prefer it.”

"Oh, you do not know; you are too good and pure to know! She just maddened me. She *tried* to. If you had married me, as I prayed you to do, last autumn, this would never have been. But in the long winter days my lips grew athirst for kisses, and she played with my heart as if she were playing at football."

"If your heart had been truly mine, she could not have had it for her plaything."

"She could not have tempted me perhaps, had I been the man you thought me. Alas! I never was; I am only a weakling. I loved you—God knows I loved you, Margaret—with all that was best and highest in me, and I craved her with all that was worst and lowest in me. If she had married me, how I should have cursed my fate when it was too late! and as soon as she had left me and I realized how she had played with me, my whole soul rejected her with loathing, and cried out, as one long athirst, for you, my saving, healing love."

"Ah, but you would have kept the whole thing from me if you could!"

"Yes, for the dear sake of your love. Are you the happier for knowing?"

Margaret shivered as with sudden cold.

"No, I am not the happier," she said sadly; "and yet, since all this *has* been, it was best and right that I should know. I do not blame you, Paul; it was not your fault that I had not her charm."

In an instant Paul, weak Paul, was at her feet,

covering her hands with his kisses and his tears, praying her desperately to forgive him. In the midst of it all a strong shudder shook Margaret. She drew her hands from him with a gesture of horror.

"Hush! It was here you knelt at her feet. I feel her in the air; I see her triumphant eyes; she is between us like a wall. I cannot stay here; I will never enter this place again. Good-by."

And before Paul had recovered from his astonishment, she was gone. He followed her to the door only to see her spring into a waiting brougham. For a moment he was hopeless. Not a cab was in sight. It was impossible for him to follow her swiftly-moving carriage. When and how should he ever find her again? Then common-sense came to his aid, and he remembered the address of her bankers. I have called Paul Rutledge a weakling; but one thing was strong in him, and that was faith in his own power to move a heart that had once loved him. Having lost Margaret, as it seemed, she instantly became the sun of his heaven, and he was ready to worship her like a Parsee.

Letter after letter pursued her. Three weeks went by, and not one of his daily letters was answered. Her bankers refused to give him her address. His cousin Mabel did not know it. He was utterly at a loss; his love grew by what it did *not* feed on, and became more desperate every day. He ceased to paint, locked his studio, and haunted the streets of London like a daytime ghost. At last one day his patience was rewarded. He saw Margaret step from

a hansom and enter a hotel. Swift as a thought he followed her and spoke to her. She could not make a scene by arguing with him in the corridor; she dared not even refuse to speak to him, for there was something in his eyes that looked to her like desperation. She let him go with her to her sitting-room. Perhaps his three weeks' unanswered letters had somewhat softened her heart. Then, as I told you in the beginning, the maternal instinct was strong in Margaret, and his very weakness appealed to her. She, no doubt, could save him from himself. If she had married him last autumn, as he had implored her to do, disaster would never have overtaken their love. She felt something the same kind of self-reproach a mother might who had left her infant alone in a wilderness and come back to find it torn by wild beasts.

"Margaret," he cried, "you are not stone; you will forgive me."

"I forgave you long ago," she said; "but I think I am stone all the same, and what you have done is graven upon the stone and can never be effaced."

"But you love me still; ah, Margaret, it is not *in* you to change easily!"

"No, I am not fickle, like you; but I am not the same woman you knew a year ago. Do you know it is just a year since the day I saw you first?"

And that reminiscence was the signal for more prayers, more tears, more penitence, more oaths such as men swear, and break almost while swearing. They would not move you or me; we are too wise.

I hardly know whether they moved Margaret, or how much she believed of them; but many thoughts had come to her during the past three weeks. She knew only too well that she could never love Paul as before; but then neither could she ever love any one else, — and her life was lonely. It might be that she could help and bless and save Paul from the dangers of his own weakness. What better thing could she do with her life? She smiled sadly while he poured out his soul before her.

“I know all you would say,” she said, “as well as if you had said it a hundred times. Perhaps you mean it—now. I can never trust you as of old. The vase has been cracked, and it can be but a patched and mended thing at best. It does not matter much for me. If you think I can help you, so be it, only you must change your studio. I will never enter that one again. That you knelt there at Nell Mason’s feet will be the one memory that will go with me into my grave and sting me even there.”

“No, my darling! my one hope! my joy! my life! the memory shall *not* go with you; I *will* drive it from your heart. You shall learn that one month of madness does not count for much in a whole lifetime. You will heal me and save me now, and be proud and glad of me by and by.”

Margaret bent over him with something as holy and tender as a prayer speaking from her blue-gray eyes, and the kiss she gave him was such an one as a mother might give to her prodigal son.

And so they were married after all, and Margaret's life is not barren, for it is better to minister than to be ministered unto; and she knows, at least, that she is the good angel of Paul Rutledge's career. So perhaps after all theirs is better than an average marriage.

ON THE STROKE OF THE CLOCK.

“There’s a time in the lives of most women and men,
When all, I say, would go smooth and even,
If but only the dead could find out when
To come back and be forgiven.”

“OF course the very idea of a ghost’s revisiting the glimpses of the moon is an absurdity on the face of it. Shakespeare himself couldn’t make it seem possible. His choicest ghosts smack of melodrama, and suggest blue lights and the smell of brimstone.”

I was rather young when I made this remark; and I think I felt a little proud of my strength of mind, and my superiority to benighted believers in the supernatural. At least, I expected the approval of the man to whom I was talking, — a hard-headed Canadian doctor, of French descent on one side and English on the other; the very last man to own to nerves or be subject to delusions. He listened to me with a somewhat singular smile; then he blew a meditative whiff from his pipe and said quietly, —

“You seem cock-sure about it. I suppose you never *saw* a ghost?”

“I’m inclined to think neither I nor any one else ever saw one,” I answered stoutly.

“So! *Let me see.* It’s November, I think, — the 15th of November. How lonesomely the wind howls! I remember just such a night as this, twenty-two years ago. I’ll tell you the story of it. I’m a tolerably sane man, — at least, I suppose that’s your present opinion, eh?”

“Rather the sanest man I know, I should say.”

“Very well. I’ll take that statement at its present value. You’ll probably want to change it by the time I get through.”

After this point our dialogue ceased, and I listened to Dr. Gerrard’s story without once interrupting him. I’ll drop my quotation marks therefore, and let him tell the tale just as he told it to me on the 15th of November, A. D. 1888.

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Twenty-two years and two weeks ago, I came home from my mother’s funeral with a desperately sad heart. My father was an Englishman, as you know. He died when I was but a boy; yet I remember his resolute though kindly nature, his strength of will, his conservatism, — all about him, in short, — as well as if he had died but yesterday. I had an unbounded reverence for him, which, indeed, he well deserved; but my whole boyish heart was given to my mother. She was French, and she had all a Frenchwoman’s charm. She was of stately height and splendid figure, and she had great dark eyes in which I could always read her

thoughts. How tender those eyes could be, and also how proud and cold! She was notably beautiful in her young days, as I have been often told since by those who remembered her. I never thought whether she was beautiful or not; I only knew she was my mother, and that I adored her.

I can remember well the passionate grief with which she mourned for my father. I truly believe that she only went on living for my sake. For my sake, too, after the first few months, she did her best to hide her grief, and to share my life, and make herself my cheerful companion as before. She had one little trick which I always associate with her memory. I was a great sleeper. She, on the contrary, was naturally an early riser, and she believed in the morning hours as the best time for all mental work. If I slept beyond seven o'clock, she always used to wake me by scratching with her delicate nails upon my pillow. I used instantly to open my eyes at this sound, and sometimes was rewarded with roses, sometimes with the motherly kisses I was so unlike most boys as really to value. Forgive me. I am dwelling too long on the past; and it is not the story of those early days that I want to tell you.

They went by quickly enough. I entered college, got through creditably, took my degree, studied medicine, and at twenty-four began my practice in my native town, where my father had been for many years a successful physician. People seemed to believe in me from the first, for his sake, and I had none of the hard struggle that usually attends the beginning

of a profession. I had a paying practice, even the first year, and by the time I was twenty-six I felt myself really well established. My mother was unreasonably proud of me, — that's a kind of delusion to which mothers are subject. Not one single shadow had ever come between us, and I did not suppose that one ever could.

I was sent for one day to attend a new case in a part of the town a little out of my usual beat. I found in my patient the most beautiful girl I had ever seen, — though even then, when I was twenty-six, and my mother was forty-four, *she* might safely have challenged comparison with this lovely young creature of eighteen. My mother was dark and stately and proud, — a woman to be worshipped. Lena Grey was slight, blue-eyed, sensitive, with a gentle, appealing manner, and a shy color that came and went on her cheeks at every breath. Her illness was not very serious, — merely a sort of slow fever, — but her parents were unduly alarmed about her.

They were such people as I had been accustomed to consider quite out of my sphere, having been brought up by my mother — who had a right to a *de* before her name — in all the absurd prejudices against trade which belonged to her race. I should never have expected to find any one with the breeding of a lady under John Grey's roof; but my mother herself was no more exquisitely refined than this girl, who soon began to seem to me the one desirable object in the whole world.

I shrank weakly from speaking about her to my mother, for I foresaw a struggle. I never dreamed, however, but that in this struggle I should speedily triumph. I made sure that my mother loved me too well to hold out long against my wishes ; but I thought I would wait before speaking to her, until I was sure of Lena's heart.

That time was not long in coming. Some magnetic attraction drew us together from the very first ; and when I asked her one day if she loved me, she raised her appealing eyes to my face almost reproachfully, and said, —

“ Don't you *know* I do, Arthur? ”

I asked her of her parents, and they promised her to me gladly. And in that moment something like a first presentiment of trouble crossed my mind. What if my mother should *not* consent?

“ You must understand,” I said, “ that I have not spoken on this matter to my mother. I hope she will approve ; but whether she does or not, remember you have promised to give me Lena. I am twenty-six years old ; besides my practice I have a comfortable fortune, inherited from my father, and I am quite able to please myself.”

They made some weak remonstrances against thrusting their daughter upon a family where she was not wanted, but I overruled them.

“ Lena is mine,” I said resolutely, as I went away ; and my heart grew strong, feeling that I had her happiness to care for as well as my own.

I went to my mother, and told her my love-story. She listened in ominous silence. When I ceased speaking she said, —

“I understand that you ask my permission to present to me as your betrothed, and afterward to make your wife, the daughter of John Grey, a tradesman?”

“Yes,” I answered in tones as resolute as her own, “I ask just that.” And then, my voice softening in spite of myself, I cried, “Only see her *once*, and you will understand. You will know she is as truly a lady as any Gerrard or de Brie of all my ancestors; and you love me, your own boy, too well to wish to break my heart.”

She rose, and stood there in the clear light, — so tall, so proud, so beautiful that it seemed as if nothing on earth could resist her. Her voice when she spoke was resolute and strong. There was not one trace in tone or manner of indecision, — not one ray of hope for me.

“It is because you are my own boy, and because with all my heart and soul I love you, that I say No, no, no! ten thousand times, no! If you choose to lift this girl out of the mud and make her your wife, you are legally free to do so. Your fortune is your own. You can rush headlong on your fate if you please; but if you marry this low-born girl, so long as God spares my life on earth I will never willingly look upon her face. If you care to see me, you must come without her, and you will spare me all mention of her name.”

“Good-by, mother,” I said, and I went away, leaving

her standing there in the sunlight, with her great eyes flashing and her cheeks and lips glowing.

Well, I married Lena. She understood perfectly the condition of things; but she was too childlike and trusting to be made unhappy by it. She believed me entirely when I told her that she could suffice for me, — that having *her* I should want nothing else. I even believed myself for a time; but after the first surprise of marriage was over, and when I had brought my wife back from her marriage journey and settled down at home in the house I had taken, I began to feel an intolerable yearning for the mother whose love, until I knew Lena, had been the one great joy and rest of my life. Would I have been unmarried again if I could? No, I think not. I loved Lena. She was as near to me as my own soul. If only we two, made one, could have had my mother's blessing!

I wrote letters in which I prayed for this; they were never answered. I went one day to the house — my mother's house — and sent up my card like a stranger. The old man-servant brought me back a pencilled message: —

“I will receive my son with pleasure, on the understanding that the person of whom he formerly spoke to me is not to be mentioned.”

To see her on those conditions seemed a sort of treachery to Lena, and I went sadly home again.

Sometimes in my professional drives I met my mother driving her fast-trotting ponies in her little phaeton where I had so often sat beside her; and we

exchanged civil bows, — she and I, who was flesh of her flesh and bone of her bone.

When Lena and I had been married a year, our little girl was born; and from the first it seemed as if she should have been my mother's child, not ours. She resembled neither of us; for I was like my father, a fair-haired Saxon, and this child, born of our love and our sorrow, was the very image of my mother in miniature. There was something almost uncanny in her great dark eyes, so much too large for her baby face. Her little fringe of hair was jet black, and her cheeks and lips were as bright as my mother's own.

We named the little one Virginia, — my mother's name; and as time went on, it grew to seem to me a certainty that her grandmother, however she might scorn my wife, could not withhold her heart from this child, who was so utterly hers by all the signs of nature.

She was a wonderfully strong and forward little creature. When she was ten months old she could say various words; and every day I showed her a large picture of my mother, and taught her to say "Grandma!" when she saw it. By the time she was fourteen months she could walk, holding by my hand; and one day I took her to see my mother, leaving my wife at home. It was a brilliant May day. The roses were beginning to bloom in sheltered nooks where the sun shone warmly; and the fruit-trees were in flower. Some birds chattered as we crossed the lawn on our way to the well-known, dear old house, and Virginia

pulled my hand to make me stop and look at them; and just then my mother came round a clump of trees, and stood suddenly confronting us. Virginie glanced at her, saw the face of the picture, and put out her little hands.

“Grandma!” she cried; “grandma!”

Oddly enough, this word, which in some blind way I had relied upon to move my mother’s heart, seemed to repel and offend her. She evidently considered the whole scene as a carefully planned *coup de théâtre*, and scorned it accordingly. Her face was cold; her eyes were hard; her voice cut the air like steel.

“You make a mistake,” she said, “in bringing here that person’s child. I do not care to see her.”

And with those words she turned her back on us, and walked off deliberately.

Virginie, unused to repulse, put up her piteous, quivering lips for my healing kiss, and I hurried her away.

That ended all hope or effort on my part to be reconciled to my mother. Ought I to have striven further? Sometimes I think so now; but I did not think so then. I used to see her at a distance, from time to time, as the summer went on, and she seemed to me to be changing strangely. Her bright color was gone; her face was growing thin. Some indefinable shadow of growing old age appeared to be settling down upon her.

On the morning of the 30th of October I heard a strenuous summons at my office door, and opened it.

My mother I was told had been found dead in her bed. They had sent for the nearest doctor, and he had pronounced it heart disease.

"Yes," I said to myself, "it was disease of the heart in more ways than one."

I hurried to the old home. I walked up the path on which she had met the child and me and looked at us with scorn and repulsion. Had she ever been sorry since? I wondered. Was *she* wrong in not forgiving me, or was *I* wholly to blame because I had disobeyed her in the first place? I kept asking myself these questions in a dazed way; but I did not try to answer them. My brain seemed reeling. I felt like one clutching at some crazy plank amid the surge and toss of whelming seas.

I stood by the bed on which they had laid her. Was there something unutterably strange and sad on her face, at war with the accustomed peace of death? I thought so. I knelt beside her. I do not know whether my lips uttered any cry; but I know that with all the passion of my soul I prayed her to forgive me if the wrong had been mine, — to grant me some token that she loved me still. But the cold, beautiful face did not soften; the relentless lips held their secret.

The second day of November I followed her to the grave. I did not take my wife with me. She who had been undesired and unwelcomed in my mother's life had no place at her tomb. I think, had I taken her there, I should have expected the scornful lips to

break their frozen death-silence and denounce me. I was half mad with grief and remorse, and I abandoned myself to fears and instincts, but had no power to reason.

Two weeks went on. I found myself unable to fulfil my usual duties. Few of my patients were seriously ill, and I made my recent bereavement an excuse for confiding them to the care of another physician. You see I do not conceal from you the disordered state of my own mind; but I have other testimony than my own of the truth and reality of the story to which all that I have already told you is but the preface.

On the night of the 15th of November I went to bed earlier than usual, utterly exhausted by my vigils since my mother's death, and I presently fell into a deep sleep; but before I dozed off, I remember listening to the wild wails of the wind. As I said, it was a night like to-night. The unquiet wind assailed the windows, and now and then uttered a low keen cry. It made me think of a spirit in pain, and I shuddered at it. The sleep that presently overcame me was merciful.

It must have been some time past midnight when I awoke suddenly, — so wide awake that I found myself sitting up in bed and listening intently to an approaching sound. It was the rumbling of my mother's phaeton that I heard — I never could have mistaken those wheels for any others — and the quick trot of her high-stepping ponies along the hard road. The carriage stopped at my gate. I did not awaken my wife, who

was sleeping beside me ; but I remember thinking with a sort of dull satisfaction how securely I had barred the front door. But in spite of bars, it seemed to me that I heard it open ; and I know that I heard my mother's footsteps come up the stairs and along the hall and enter my very chamber. I sank back upon the pillow and shut my eyes and feigned to be asleep ; and presently—doubt it as you will—I heard upon my pillow the same scratching of her slender fingers with which she used to wake me when a boy.

I opened my eyes and saw—for a night-lamp was burning as usual—the unutterable sadness of her look. Then she moved away, and walked to the crib, where at a little distance my child was sleeping ; and I give you my word that as she stood there, as if under some strange compulsion, Virginie opened her eyes, fixed them for a moment or two on my mother's face, said “Grandma!” and then threw up her little hands over her head and seemed to go to sleep again. My mother stood there looking at her for some moments ; then she slowly moved away and passed out of the room, and I remember that at that very moment the clock struck one. In a moment more I heard the rumble of her phaeton and the trotting feet of her ponies, and then I put on my dressing-gown and lit a candle at the night-lamp and went downstairs.

The door was bolted and barred just as I had left it, and there was no trace anywhere of the mysterious presence that had passed. I lay awake and pondered over what had happened. Surely she had heard my

prayers for her forgiveness, and she had come to show me that she had accorded it to me; and I thought she had stood so long beside the child to show me that her old stern resolution not to see her was over now. I tried to feel satisfied and relieved, but I was haunted by the sadness of her look. There must be something she wanted to convey besides her forgiveness. What could it be?

Do you wonder that I remember well the 15th of November, — the first time I ever knew, believed, or even dreamed that the dead could come again? Before that I was as scornfully sceptical as you are now. As I lay there and thought, the teasing wind blew a branch of the leafless tree against the pane with a sort of scratching sound not unlike the one with which my mother had awakened me. It made me shiver. I drew the bedclothes over my head, and finally I went to sleep.

In the morning I kept silence about what had passed, and the next night I bolted and barred the doors as usual. I did not certainly anticipate another visit from my mother, for I thought she had come to make known her forgiveness, and that being done, would stay quietly in the grave where we had laid her. Still the hour between midnight and one o'clock found me very wide awake indeed. I was certainly in no less clear possession of my faculties than I am at this moment when I heard again the rumble of that phaeton, the feet of those ponies. This time my mother had no need to waken me.

My eyes met hers as she entered the room. I had left the night-lamp a little higher than before. I saw that she was dressed as she was when we laid her in her coffin, in a rich, soft-falling gown of heavy black satin. I could see on her finger her wedding-ring, the only one we had buried with her.

This time she did not come to my bedside, but she went and bent over the child's; and again, as by some strange compulsion, the little one opened her eyes and murmured rather sleepily, "Grandma, come again!" and in a moment was once more asleep. But no smile came to the sad eyes that were watching her; the shadow of an immortal pain seemed on the face which death had given back. I longed to speak to her, but I could not. My throat was parched. My tongue would not move. I hardly breathed.

Suddenly the clock struck one, and on the stroke of it she vanished.

The next morning I told my wife. She was strongly impressed by my story, which she never thought of arguing away, or even of questioning. She begged me if our visitor ever came again to awaken her, which finally with some reluctance I promised to do.

The third night arrived, and I was mercifully able to go to sleep. I did not hear the rumble of the phaeton at the gate or the feet of the ponies. I heard nothing, indeed, until the sound of the delicate fingers I knew so well, scratching on my pillow as of old, awakened me. I opened my eyes, and the sad eyes of the dead met them; and then, as before, my mother

moved away and stood over the bed of my little Virginie.

"Lena!" I whispered to my wife.

She slipped her hand into mine.

"I hear," she answered in a low whisper. "I am watching her. I think she wants something."

Low as her whisper was, evidently my mother heard it, for a look of unmistakable relief and hope crossed her face. My wife was observing her closely, and her woman's instinct supplied the interpretation of this look as my duller wits never could have done.

"I think," Lena said slowly, "that she wants us to forgive *her*."

These words seemed to me a sort of sacrilege. I would have thrown myself at my mother's feet and prayed anew for her forgiveness, but some power outside myself restrained me. And surely a look of relief, as of one who is understood at last after long endeavor, dawned upon her face, and yet she seemed not quite satisfied. Then Lena spoke, and her voice sounded to me like that of an angel whom love had made strong; and she said with gentle clearness of tone, —

"Yes, mother, we forgive you with all our hearts."

And as if constrained and almost against my will, I too said after her, as one says "amen" after a prayer, "With all our hearts."

And just at that moment Virginie opened her eyes and cried, "Grandma, come again!" and though my eyes were dim with a rush of sudden tears, it seemed

to me that I saw my mother bend toward her, and the child's arms reach up for an instant to her neck.

And then my mother lifted her face, her happy face, and there was a light in her great eyes such as made me think of the days of her youth, when she used to welcome my father home. Her lips moved. I thought they formed the words, "Good-by, children!"

And at that moment the clock struck one, and she was gone. Then I heard for the last time the rumble of her departing wheels, and Lena heard it also, and cried softly and silently as she lay there with her head on my bosom.

One day, a week afterward, Virginie said, —

"Grandma never comes any more;" and we knew that the child remembered.

No, I never saw any other ghost; why should I? I do not think they are visitors of every day; but I know — whether it be possible for the dead to return or not — that twenty-two years ago this night I saw my mother, who had been two weeks buried, stand at my bedside.

NAN:

A NEW ENGLAND LOVE-STORY.

“ I HATE it all; oh, *how* I hate it!”

It was Nan Allen who made this outburst, sitting in the comfortable “sitting-room” of a New England farm-house, and rocking to and fro in a New England rocking-chair. Considering how the world wags in general, and that one of our greatest statisticians has told us that one in every seven of the inhabitants of Great Britain dies a pauper,—it would not seem to a well-regulated mind that Nan had much to complain of. It was late in October. The “fall cleaning” was over; stoves were set up in the many rooms of Farmer Allen’s house; cleanliness reigned, and the warmth within defied the menaces of the “hard winter” which every one was predicting.

The look of homely well-being, without one ray of beauty to brighten it, made foolish Nan’s very heart sick. The close heat of the air-tight stove went to her head, and she sighed as she wondered vaguely what life meant. Others besides herself wondered what Nan Allen’s life meant. She was a conundrum, which so far no one had taken the trouble to guess, though we have all seen other such conundrums in plenty. She was the daughter of parents without one

ray of imagination. She had grown up in a home where the "Evangelical Family Library" did duty for literature, and Fox's "Book of Martyrs" was the nearest approach to a romance. And yet Nan was a beauty-lover and a dreamer. I doubt if under the most favoring circumstances she could have written a book or painted a picture. Hers was the sympathetic, not the creative imagination; still the love of beauty had been born in her. Starved into silence by her circumstances, it ached on in her heart.

As a child she had been content with the sunsets that burned the western hills; the roses that rioted in the old garden in June; the sturdy autumn flowers that lifted their haughty, handsome heads to face the November blasts. She had been what the New England people called a romp; that is, she had climbed trees, and roamed far afield after berries, tamed squirrels, and coasted down hill when the winter had glazed the hillsides with snow and ice. Occupied with these pleasures, she had failed to realize the barrenness of her home-life, — the utter want of grace and beauty in all its appointments. But one day the bud becomes a flower, and one day Nan ceased to be a child. Then her life confronted her just as it was, — barren and narrow and monotonous, and with no apparent hope of better days; and in the summer just past she had made a friend who had opened to her a glimpse of another world. A girl not much older than Nan herself had been sent to Ryefield to board. Miss Amory was not very strong; and while her mother had led

forth two older daughters to the glories of conquest at Saratoga and afterward at Newport, the family doctor had decreed for Blanche a quiet summer, and had persuaded a brother physician at Ryefield to take her into his family.

In some of Miss Amory's walks she had met Nan Allen, and suddenly they had become friends. Blanche Amory, with her patrician grace, her fair face, and her perfect toilets, had dawned on Nan as a revelation of what life might be. It seemed as if her very dreams had taken shape. She surrendered herself heart and soul to the new-comer. Miss Amory, in turn, was delighted with Nan in something the same way in which she might have enjoyed an unaccustomed school of art, a fresh musical sensation, a new country to travel in.

She had never before seen anything like this girl, so frank, so honest; so humble, yet so proud; so appreciative, yet so ignorant; so well-bred, yet so unaccustomed to society. Miss Amory from Boston, used to all things and tired of most, read this new page of human nature with ever fresh delight.

From this young high-priestess of the proper, quick-witted Nan caught speedily the jargon of art and of society. She had longed vaguely hitherto for something other than she had known. Now her desires defined themselves; for she learned what she ought to wish for. Her very soul hungered within her for pictures and carvings and Turkish rugs and old china and the other things which all seemed common and necessary as daily bread to the girl from Boston.

Nan used to wonder how Miss Amory would endure life at Ryefield when the short, cold days should come, and a wildwood moss-carpeted drawing-room was no longer among the possibilities. Would this patrician creature be able to endure the things Nan's own soul loathed? Happily the fair Blanche was spared the ordeal. While September days were still keeping the world warm, Miss Amory's oldest brother came to take her away from Ryefield.

Of course Nan Allen saw her friend's brother; and in Quincy Amory she discovered a second time that her unformed ideal had taken shape. This, then, was what a man should be, — so polished, so graceful, and with such clothes! It might be inglorious, she owned to herself, to consider the clothes; but after all they were a revelation, and they, as much as his intonation and his walk, emphasized the difference between Boston and Ryefield. He was very gracious to Nan, — for his sister's sake, no doubt; but he could not help knowing that she was a pretty girl, a far prettier girl, if the truth must be told, than even Blanche Amory.

Miss Amory was blond, tall, slight, with clear blue eyes, well-cut features, and reposeful manners, — a kind of human Easter lily. Nan was a spicy rose, thorny perhaps, but fragrant and provoking, with her dark curling hair, her dark bright eyes, her petite figure, her red lips, and her cheeks like the sunny side of a peach. Quincy Amory quite shared his sister's regret when they bade bonny Nan good-by at the Ryefield station.

That parting was a month ago, and meantime October frosts had chilled the air, and the vivid autumn leaves had blown down the gale, and Mrs. Allen and her maid-of-all-work had done the fall cleaning; and here, in the midst of all the comfortable, commonplace, unbeautiful surroundings which her soul loathed, sat Nan. How she hated the rag carpet on the floor, and the mats braided out of the old clothes which could do duty as garments no longer, and the kerosene lamps, round which their betraying odor always lingered, and the air-tight stove, and the mottoes wrought in worsted work that hung upon the wall. Was it a sin to hate it all, she wondered. Here, to be sure, here, and not elsewhere, her lot had been cast, and it might be that she ought to be grateful for it.

“No, that is too much,” she said aloud. “Patient, if you like, but grateful!”

And just then John Payne came in. I have not mentioned John because Nan had thought so very little about him during the past summer; and yet he had been a part of her life ever since she could remember. When she went to district school, John, three or four years older than herself, had been her companion. John had brought her fruit and flowers, and guided her sled when she coasted, and waited on her whims like a faithful dog; and she had taken all John's services as simply and as much as if they were a matter of right as she ate her breakfast. But when Miss Amory came into her life, John went out of it. She had no need of him then; and he had been very

busy all summer, and was wise enough besides to know when not to intrude.

But now he came in, in the October afternoon, to say something which he began to think he had left unsaid too long. He had entered by the back way, and had seen that Mrs. Allen was in the depths of sweet pickle. He was therefore not likely to be interrupted. Here sat Nan, piquant, wilful, dark-eyed, rose-sweet Nan, with a look on her face which, to say the least, offered no vantage-ground to sentiment. Something might have whispered to John that the occasion was not favorable; but though he was country bred, he was after all no coward, and he chose to make his own occasions rather than wait for them. Nan looked up as he came in, somewhat listlessly.

“Ah! sit down, John. No doubt the stove will make your head ache. It does mine; but we must get used to it.”

John sat down; but the warmth of which he began to speak was not that of the stove. And suddenly Nan found herself listening with a curious interest while he told her that he had been in love with her ever since he could remember. Nan was not a self-conscious girl, and she had really never thought of John Payne in this way. She looked curiously at him as he spoke. She had never considered what he was like before. He was a strong, resolute, handsome fellow. There was no denying that he was handsomer than Quincy Amory. But then — his coat! And his

hands were hard ; and there was — yes, there *was* — the slightest suspicion of what Mr. Amory would have called a Yankee twang in his voice. And as for loving him, — why, of course she loved John ; she always had, but it was n't in that way. If only it had been Quincy Amory !

“ Why, I'm sure I don't know, John,” she said candidly, when his “ winged words ” had been spoken. “ I never thought of your feeling like *this*. I don't see why you were n't contented to go on just as we always have. That was nice enough, I'm sure.”

“ Nice enough for you,” John answered firmly, “ but not for me. It's very little I've seen of you the past summer, and I've found out that I want a good deal more.”

Nan shook her curly head and sat for a space deep in consideration.

“ I don't seem able to think it out quite so suddenly,” she said. “ Give me till to-morrow. Only one thing, John ; if I said yes, you would have to go away from here.”

“ Yes ? ” John said, inquiringly.

“ Yes, certainly, John. I dislike rag carpets ; I hate braided mats ; I loathe air-tight stoves. Life here is stagnation. If I — if what you wish were ever to come to pass, it could not be until after you had made a life for yourself somewhere else. You are clever enough for that, are n't you, John ? ” and she looked him over reflectingly.

"Yes, I believe I am," he answered with a half-vexed laugh, for this was not at all like the love-scene with his thornless rose which he had pictured to himself. "I have sometimes thought myself that I might make a broader life somewhere else; but perhaps I was too impatient to win my wife to be willing to go away from a certainty, and wait Heaven knows how long."

"Well, but, John dear, that's the only way you could win me. There *is* only one certainty, and that is that I will *not* live here. Now go away, and I'll try to think it all out by to-morrow night."

"I've been asking Nan to marry me," John said, pausing in the kitchen to speak to Mrs. Allen on the way out.

"You don't say so! Will she?"

"I don't know yet. I shall find out to-morrow."

And John Payne went his way. Mrs. Allen understood Nan well enough not to speak to her; and that night the girl did more serious thinking than she had ever done before. She sent her thoughts back through her seventeen years of life, and she found John Payne all along the way. She was very used to John, certainly. But did she love him? She was not sure. Perhaps she felt all that other girls did who married, and it was only the same thing in her which sighed for impossible rugs and pictures and old china that cried out now for a more romantic love, a more dazzling lover. Anyway, no one but John was likely to love *her*, she thought; and if she ever were to get out

of Ryefield, it must be by means of his taking her. With that for a conclusion to her thinking, she went to sleep.

Late in the next afternoon John came again.

"Well?" he said, standing before her and putting out his strong hands.

"Oh, sit down, John; you make me nervous standing there. I've thought it all out. I'm pretty sure I like you well enough; but I can't stay *here*. It must all depend on whether you make a home somewhere else."

John's eyes grew cold and his lips stiffened a little.

"You mean that you will promise to marry me after I have gone out into the world and won such a measure of success as seems to you worth accepting?"

"Yes, John."

"You are a shrewder young lady than I gave you credit for being, my dear. But you are right enough, no doubt. You hate this narrow life and all its small economies. Why indeed, then, should you bind yourself to live in it? I have made my plans. I thought once of studying law; but that is slow business. I have written to-day to Uncle Jared Smith, my mother's brother. He is one of the great merchants of New York, and he has always promised to find me a place with him if I would come. He has no son of his own; and there would be a reasonable chance, if I pleased him, of my being taken into the firm. Would that suit you?"

Nan's eyes fairly danced. New York! Why that would be even better than Boston!

"Oh, you dear John!" she cried eagerly. "And when will you go?"

"In the latter part of November, if Uncle Jared is ready for me then. Are you in such a desperate hurry for me to leave?"

"Oh, John, don't look at me like that! The sooner you go the sooner it will come to pass, won't it?"

And John smiled a little grimly, and made up his mind that it was really just as well they were not to be married at present. Perhaps his thorny little sweetheart would care more for him after she had tried for a year or two what life would be like without him. Even now she gave him all she had to give. Was it well to complain of a rose-tree because it could not be an oak, especially if one loved the rose?

For the next month all went well. Uncle Jared rejoiced by letter over the prospect of having his nephew with him. All John's arrangements were made for leaving home; and Nan's gay smiles brightened the gloom of the season,—for Nan was in love with the prospect of ultimate New York, if with nothing else. And so the time went on until the 21st of November.

On the 23d John Payne was to leave Ryefield. He talked over his plans with Nan the night of the 21st for the hundredth time. She found them a very safe subject,—for, long as she had known John, she was very shy of him as a lover, and would rather hear him talk of anything else than that love of his that was so

strong and so genuine that it came into her life somewhat like a persistent north wind ruffling a garden of roses. When John went away, he held her hand for a long time, and looked deep down into her eyes till she grew petulant and asked him what he saw, and what was wrong. And John smiled a puzzling smile as he answered, —

“Nothing is wrong, I think. What does not exist cannot be wrong. I have got to wait for your heart to be born. I shall come to-morrow night for good-by.”

But long before the next night news had gone abroad in Ryefield that Ezra Payne, John’s father, had been stricken with paralysis. At first the doctors had thought there was little hope for his life, but they began to be more cheerful about him after a few hours.

What would this mean to John, Nan wondered. That night of November 22, Nan’s father, always a good neighbor, went to watch beside his old friend. The doctor was there also, and John got away and came to Nan.

“This is not good-by in the sense I expected,” he said; “but I suppose it is good-by in another way, and a long good-by too. Nan, have you realized that now I must stay in Ryefield?”

“*Must*, John?”

“Yes, must, even though it should cost me all the joy of my life. I, and no other, must care for my father and fill his place. There is no help. I have thought and thought, and there is no other way. I cannot leave my plain duty undone. But I do not

bind you, Nan, to the life of Ryefield. You shall be free."

"And you won't mind?" Nan whispered timidly.

"Mind!" The word came like a cry from John Payne's lips. Then he held himself in with a strong hand and spoke very quietly. "No, I won't mind, if you mean by that, being angry. I will not blame you. You were honest to me from the first, and we do not look for a rose to bloom in the storms of winter. Good-by, little Nan, whom I have loved all my life."

There was a deep note in his voice that brought the tears to Nan's eyes. She sat there silently after he was gone, wondering whether, after all, love might not be worth more than some other things, and whether any one else would ever love her as John did.

That very week an unexpected invitation came to her to pass two or three months with her summer friend, Miss Amory. Blanche had not forgotten her, then. Proud and glad as she was of this, she would have been no less so had she known how urgently Quincy Amory had jogged his sister's memory.

Nan was quite used to have her own way, and she got it in this instance. A week's time found her at home in the Amory mansion under the shadow of the dome of the State House. Blanche's two sisters had gone on a visit to an aunt in Baltimore, and Blanche was lonely enough without them to give Nan an eager welcome. And now indeed Nan felt that she had just begun to live. A grub might feel thus, she fancied, when he first discovered he was a butterfly. Here, in

this ancestral home—where British officers had danced stately minuets when Massachusetts was a colony—were all the delights of which Nan had vainly dreamed. Pictures, china, rugs, carvings, old silver, curios from every country under the sun,—the glory of all the kingdoms of the world. Ah, this it was to live!

Papa Allen had not sent his only child away with an empty purse; and Miss Amory helped to choose the simple yet dainty costumes that made the pretty country girl ten times prettier. And if Quincy Amory had been touched before by her wild-rose charms, he found them in this new setting yet more beguiling. And since he—the only son of his father—could afford to please himself in marriage, he began to say to himself “Why not?” Doubtless Nan might have said “Why not?” too, if such a wild thought could ever have crossed her brain as that this man to whom she looked up with such unbounded and admiring homage could care for her. To be loved by the most princely man she had ever seen; to live always in this new world of beauty,—no, Nan’s fancies were not strong-winged enough to soar so high.

But as the weeks went on, and she grew used to luxury, it began to fill her heart not quite so full as at first. Sometimes in the midst of all the glories that surrounded her, her thoughts went back to Ryefield, and she heard John’s voice say once more, —

“Good-by, little Nan, whom I have loved all my life.”

Quincy Amory did not ask her to marry him until

she had been his sister's guest for three months. It was the very last day but one of February when one night he found that she, a little tired perhaps of pleasure, had stayed at home instead of going with his sister to a party as had been planned. Here was his ready-made opportunity, of which he availed himself in the most high-bred and polished manner. Perhaps there was an indescribable something in his voice and bearing that brought it home to Nan that he was conferring upon her an extreme distinction instead of seeking from her, as John Payne had done, the crowning grace and glory of his own life.

If he had made his offer the first month Nan was there — while yet she was dazzled by the splendor and nobility of everything — I have little doubt but that she would have accepted it. Now that she had grown used to things, they had less power over her, and she began, instead of contemplating the glories of Quincy Amory's birth and state, to ask herself if this high-bred, listless young man really loved her. Suddenly she asked the question out loud, —

“Are you quite sure you love me, Mr. Amory?”

“Quite sure, indeed. Could I have any other motive?”

And his words and his tone lent force to her already keen sense that it was something akin to the red ribbon of the Legion of Honor which this Mayflower-descended young man was proposing to bestow on her. What imp of the perverse was it that would not let her say yes?

"Please, I must think a little," she answered quietly, just as she had answered John Payne before. "I will tell you to-morrow night."

And Mr. Amory seemed quite at ease. No doubt he approved of the delicacy that would not be too eager. It suited his taste, and even enhanced the girl's value in his eyes. He talked then about indifferent subjects, — some new paintings at the Art Museum, the photographs at Doll & Richards's from the pictures of "The Hermitage," a coming performance of the Passion music.

Nan was glad at last when she could civilly get away to her own room and think the whole thing over. A soft coal-fire was burning in her grate, and it lighted the luxurious room with its warm, soft hangings, its sleepy-hollow chairs, and the dainty writing-table with all its pretty appointments. This was just what Nan longed for, — what she had craved dumbly ever since she could remember. She had only to say "Yes" to have it and all it symbolized her own for always. What was the drawback? Why did she hear and hear, over and over again, that last good-by of John's? Was it possible that she too had loved him all her life — *all* her life — and had never known it until now? Was it because it was another, and not John, who offered them to her that all the external things she had craved so long seemed to her, in this hour, of no account? She thought late into the night, and then she slept a fitful sleep, in which she dreamed that John Payne and Quincy Amory were each pulling her, one to the right,

the other to the left, and she woke with a little cry on her lips lest she should be torn in two.

The next morning she said to Miss Amory, "I must go home to-morrow. It will be the first day of spring."

And despite all persuasion she kept to this resolution. Quincy Amory heard of her purpose with no misgivings. It seemed natural that after having promised to marry him she should think it well to go away. Her delicate sense of propriety was one of her charms. He went without a misgiving to find her in the library, whither she had betaken herself after dinner.

"Well, my wilful wild rose," he said gayly, as he took his seat beside her, "are you ready to answer me?"

"Quite ready, Mr. Amory."

He smiled.

"Don't you think you could learn to say Quincy, now?"

"No, Mr. Amory, for I shall have no right."

The careless smile died on his lips, and his eyes looked into hers with a sudden grave inquiry.

"Do you mean," he said, "that you do not like me?"

"Oh, no, no; I like you so much. I mean only that that is *all*. It is not enough, is it?"

"That depends. Do you care for any one else in that way?"

Sudden blushes turned Nan's face scarlet.

"I'm afraid that *is* it," she said. "I did not know it till last night. It was only when I came to think what it would be to stay away always from Ryefield that I began to understand what I felt for some one I have known all my life."

"No doubt you are quite right," he said a little stiffly. "Of course you are right if there is some one else."

The tears gathered in Nan's dark eyes. "*Don't* be vexed at me," she said humbly and sweetly. "I am not at all the girl you ought to marry. You should have some one who is used to your world and all the ways of it. As for me, I belong to Ryefield."

The best and noblest side of Quincy Amory came out then and there. He took Nan's little brown hand and raised it to his lips.

"You are a good, frank, sweet girl," he said; "and you would have been the one for me had you loved me. You did not, and it is my loss."

He was so good and gentle that Nan half thought she had made a mistake even then, but deep down in her heart she knew better; and she went on her way the next day with contentment.

She took the father and mother at home by surprise. They had looked for her in the spring, but not on this first day of it, when March was coming in, keen still with the cold of winter, and wild with turbulent gusts.

"Dear me!" her mother said, — using the New England woman's natural form of invocation, — "*dear*

me! I expect it'll seem pretty strange to you here, now you've got used to gas and furnaces and all kinds of city fixings."

And the truth was it *did* seem strange; and the rigid, bare, unbeautiful usefulness of everything was not one whit more attractive to beauty-loving Nan than of old.

"*How's* John?" she asked, hastily changing the subject.

"John! Oh, I guess he's pretty well; but he's got his hands full. They say old Mr. Payne's no good at all; but he has n't any notion o' dyin'. And John tends *him*, and sees to his mother, and keeps everything going on the farm; and it's no wonder if he *has* grown thin and looks kind o' worn and peaked like. He's had a hard time doin' *his* duty, John has."

Nan wondered if people always had hard times doing their duty, and secretly concluded that this was probably the case.

How did John Payne know that she had got home? But somehow people always did know things in Rye-field; and it was nothing strange that John should come walking in after supper was over. Mrs. Allen was helping her "girl" wash up the dishes; Mr. Allen was helping his "man" do the chores; and Nan sat alone in the sitting-room, where the kerosene lamp did duty for gas, and already the air-tight stove made her head ache. Or, after all, was it not something else and not the stove? Was it that she was regretting a little the lovely rose-hung, wax-lighted room

where she had been wont to sit at this hour and look into the fire? Did she possibly regret that with her own hand she had shut against herself the gate of that Beacon Hill Eden forever?

John came in quietly and saw her before she saw him,—saw her with eyes into which grew a strange tenderness. Soon she felt his presence and looked around.

“Oh, John!” she cried; and there was unmistakable gladness in her tone.

“You *are* glad to see me, then, even after Boston?”

Nan looked up into his face. The old loving light was in his eyes. No, he had *not* changed.

“Come and sit down,” she said, “and I’ll tell you how I feel after Boston.”

John sat down, but he kept his hands quietly before him,—those hands that always used to be seeking hers.

“John!”

It was a low tone, with a little quiver of pathos in it.

“John!”

“Yes, Nan.”

“I hate rag carpets.”

“Yes, Nan.”

“And I hate braided mats and kerosene lamps and air-tight stoves and—life as it is in Ryefield. But there’s one thing I hate worse yet, John.”

“Yes, Nan?” this time with a note of interrogation.

“Yes, I hate worse any life—any life at all—where you can’t come in at twilight, and where I’m

far, far away from somebody who said he had loved me all my life."

John grew pale suddenly. Watchful Nan saw the color leave his face, and the hands that had not yet sought hers were trembling.

"Nan," he said, "do you quite know what you are saying?"

"Yes, I *quite* know. You see I *did n't* know last November; but I went away and found out."

And why should I play Paul Pry at the rest of the interview, since after all the story ends like a fairy tale, with—"And so they were married."

FOR PASTIME.

IF anything could make one sure of a destiny that shapes our ends, and against which it is of very little use to contend, it would be the odd and apparently unaccountable freaks that now and then take possession of a man, and lead him to do something altogether outside of his usual routine and contrary to his habits of life. In the case of a man of leisure, whose inclination naturally forms his habits, you might easily suppose them contrary to his inclination as well. It was a freak of this kind which led Walter Phelps to refuse to join a family party, consisting of his own mother and sisters, his younger brother John, and his cousin, Miss Winifred Sturgis, with her maiden aunt. They were to make the tour of the Northern lakes, and to settle down for a few restful weeks in the Lake Superior region, returning in time for the grand climacteric at Saratoga, and the parting glories of the season at Newport.

He wanted a little outing quite to himself, he said, and said it as one who was in earnest. It was something new for him. He was one of the men fond of being entertained, and accustomed to be made much of; fond too of his own womankind, and usually quite

to be relied on for escort duty. His mother and sisters had remonstrated at first, but he told them that with John in attendance, they surely would not need him. And Miss Winifred Sturgis, his cousin, maintained that he was quite right. So they had started for the northwest and he for the northeast at about the same time. He had provided himself with the multitudinous equipment of an angler, and already he had stopped in two or three small villages in New Hampshire, failing so far to find a spot which the trout and he were agreed in approving.

At last, one evening he was staging through the beautiful Pemigewasset valley, and watching the sunset glory upon the hills and over the tranquil river. They were just entering a little village, and he turned his eyes by chance — still Destiny, you see, was playing him as if he had been a pawn on a chess-board — away from the river, crimson with sunset, to notice on the other side a picturesque old house among the trees. As they came opposite the door, he saw standing in it a girl whose lovely piquant face flashed on his sight for a moment and then vanished, as the stage-driver, after the manner of his tribe, whipped up his tired horses into a wild spasm of despairing energy in order to drive up in state to the hotel. Mr. Phelps had meant only to spend the night in this little village of Riverside; but it began to look to him like a good trout region. When he was shown into a large comfortable chamber overlooking the river, his conviction strengthened; and by the time he had eaten his neatly-

served, well-cooked supper, he was sure that if the trout did not come there, it was so much the worse for the trout.

A soft summer moon was rising as he went out on the piazza ; and he strolled away in the tempting summer night, and went — but this was of set purpose, and not at all to be put down to the account of Destiny — toward the house where he had seen the vision of fresh young loveliness in the doorway. It was a picturesque old place, a square house, the roof sloping up on each side toward a square erection, which was a sort of large-sized cupola. The trees that overshadowed this New England home were old and stately enough for an English park, — haughty-looking trees, though they belonged to plain New England people. I use that word “belonged” as if it were not a mockery to talk of transient wayfarers on this planet as owning the solid earth, the waiting hills, the whispering trees, that were here long before they came, that will be here, glowing in the warmth and light of each day’s sunshine, long after these brief sojourners are dust. Shall property mock its possessor with its own permanence?

But Walter Phelps was not of a speculative turn of mind ; he only thought of the trees as indicating an old estate. “Some of our stout New England yeomanry,” he mused, “who may very likely have lived here for generations. The old house seems almost as strong as the land it is built on ; but that girl looked like an exotic. She must be worth knowing, if one could only find out a way. But she is not the girl, nor

are such people as live here the people to permit any impertinent familiarity."

Just then Destiny took up the cards again, and shuffled them for him.

A horse came tearing along the country road at a frightful pace. It took only a glance to show the looker-on that he was running away. The vehicle, a sort of doctor's sulky, was swaying from side to side, and its occupant had evidently lost all control of the excited horse. Mr. Phelps glanced round. A few rods in front of him the road turned suddenly and sharply, and unless the animal had sense enough to turn with it, there was nothing to prevent him from dashing everything to pieces against a solid stone wall. There was no lack of pluck or of muscle about Walter Phelps. He had been stroke oar of his boat's crew in college; he had reserved force enough, and knew how and where to use it. He walked leisurely toward the horse with an air as listless and *degagé* as if he were in a ball-room; but suddenly he had caught the bit with a grip like steel, and the astonished animal stood still in the highway, much surprised, no doubt, at this interruption to his high-footed proceedings.

"Much obliged, I'm sure," came a voice from the interior of the carriage; "I had been calculating the probabilities, and had about concluded that unless I should be saved by a miracle, it would take a better surgeon than I am myself to set my bones. If you'll hold this blood-and-thunder quadruped a moment more, I'll get out and lead him home."

With which words a portly man of a little past fifty descended from the sulky and reached out for the bridle-rein.

"Let me keep it," Walter Phelps said politely; "you are somewhat shaken by your adventure. Let me lead the beast home, or drive him, as you please."

"Oh, home is just here, and you will come in and let Bessie thank you."

Could the young beauty be this man's wife? But no; the idea was monstrous. A shuffling sort of farm-hand had heard the noise by this time, and came round to the gate.

"Take good care of this horse, and rub him down well, for he's been having plenty of exercise," said the master, coolly; and then the horse was led away, and the two men walked up together from the front gate to the house. Already the beauty of Walter Phelps's sunset vision was in the door.

"Well, Miss Bessie," the master of the house said cheerfully, "the new steed has been running away. I stood a fair chance of being dashed to pieces against the stone wall; but when I had just said to myself that I could only be saved by a miracle, this unknown hero caught my horse by the bit and saved me. It only wanted that I should have been a beautiful and belated damsel, instead of a hoary old country doctor, to have it read like a page out of a novel."

"You are better worth saving than any belated damsel I know of," Bessie said, as she kissed him;

"and how I thank the 'miracle' that saved you I have no words strong enough to tell."

"The 'miracle' is Walter Phelps, by name, at your service, and only too glad of so easy an opportunity to earn your thanks. I am staying at the hotel near by; and I will call to-morrow, if I may, to see whether the adventure has had any more serious consequences than appear at present."

"The more often we see you the better," his host answered with cordial hospitality, and Phelps fancied that Miss Bessie's eyes seconded the invitation.

"Papa is forgetting to tell you that he is Dr. Crandall," she said, as she bade him good-night; "the only doctor in the place, and you've done a good many people a service when you kept *his* bones whole."

So fate had been, was it kind or unkind — only the future can say which — to Walter Phelps; let us call it indulgent. He walked back through the moonlight to his hotel in a mood of mild self-congratulation. She was certainly a girl — they were a family — on whom no impertinent intrusion would have been tolerated. He might have stayed in Riverside all summer, angling in vain for the opening which Destiny and his own steel-like muscles had made for him to-night. He was born under a lucky star. But just there conscience pricked him, and asked a question he could not evade. Why did he want to know this Bessie Crandall; what could she be to him; why should he seek her? He stood still, and answered the inquiry — answered it all the more defiantly because he knew he was wrong.

"I want to know her just for pastime; and why not? Are men and women like tinder and flint that they cannot meet without falling in love? In this dull place any interest is a blessing. No doubt I shall entertain Miss Crandall as much as her beauty will please me; and when the summer is over it will be autumn all the same, whether we have amused ourselves or been bored."

Mr. Phelps went down late to breakfast the next morning, and found himself a hero. Dr. Crandall had driven by, and stopped to tell the landlord the story of his rescue. Phelps had saved from accident the most popular man in the village, and the village was determined to make much of him. He did not go over to Dr. Crandall's until afternoon; he would not be in haste or intrusive. The doctor was not at home, — possibly he had counted on this in timing his visit; but Bessie received him with a satisfying welcome.

"I took it lightly last night," she said, "but I never slept all night for thinking how easily he might have been killed; and he is all I have in the world."

Walter Phelps begged her not to humiliate him by too much gratitude for a service which cost him nothing beyond a momentary exertion of strength; but her thanks and praises were very pleasant, nevertheless. He leaned back in his chair and surveyed her critically from under half-closed lids. She was a lady, certainly. His cousin Winifred was no more entirely well-bred; but how different they were, — as different as ice and

fire, flesh and marble. Bessie was slight and lissom and girlish of figure. She had great dusky eyes, out of which the child's eagerness had not yet faded, though the woman's longing and passion were in them too. Her hair was dark, with a soft ripple in it. Her features were piquant rather than regular; the broad, sunny brow, the nose not quite straight, the sensitive, sweet mouth, the clear, dark skin, the rounded cheeks where the color came and went, — you could not ask for anything brighter or lovelier, or yet more different from the absolute perfection of Miss Winifred Sturgis, not one line of whose classic face an artist would have ventured to criticise.

Their manners were as unlike as their faces. Both were perfectly refined, but Miss Sturgis had the aplomb and self-possession, the unvarying calmness and repose which come only of careful training and wide social experience. Bessie, on the other hand, was swayed by her impulses as a butterfly is blown by a summer wind. These impulses, however, being always pure and sweet, the moods of a womanly and gracious soul, the result was quite as charming as the more reasonable deportment of a colder woman. Unconsciously all these comparisons drifted through the young man's mind. Miss Sturgis was the woman whom, aside from his mother and sisters, he had seen most of in his life, and of whom he had almost unknowingly made a standard of comparison for all other women. Bessie was so curiously unlike her that there was a charm in this new study.

To do him justice, he pursued it faithfully. He pretended to be there for trout-fishing; but the trout had little to fear. There was always a reason for his going to see Bessie Crandall which would not admit of delay. He sent to town for books and music, and one by one he must take them to her. He had a tenor voice, full of flexibility and sweetness, and he sang to her while she played his accompaniments. If he went fishing, she must go to show him the way. None of these proceedings disturbed Dr. Crandall. The manner in which their acquaintance began had made the doctor friendly. He was glad to make the return of a cheerful and cordial hospitality. As for Bessie, it never occurred to him that she was in any danger. If it had been suggested, he would have said that he knew Bessie, and she was n't the girl to fancy every acquaintance a lover, or to lose her heart until somebody asked for it.

In this last he would have been right; but there are more ways of asking than one. Walter Phelps spoke no word of love; but the songs he sang were tender with some passionate old poet's devotion and longing; the books he gave her were such as a lover would choose; and his daily eagerness to see her told her more plainly than words how pleasant he found her society. She combined in her nature the fervor of a woman and the honest simplicity of a child. She was too inexperienced to ask herself why he did not *speak*; it was sufficient for her that he *was*. Her heart had been like a tight-closed rosebud when he came, and

its petals were opening already to the warmth of this new summer, of which he was the sun.

Meantime he, poor fellow, was not quite comfortable in his mind. This acquaintance had not been less pleasant than he imagined it would be, but it was growing too serious. Not that Bessie had in the slightest degree thrown herself at his head. She was too delicate a woman — too shy beneath her frankness — for anything like that. To save his life he could not tell whether she **really cared for him or not**, and he was beginning to long ardently to know. Yet it was a question that he must not ask; and he began to see that from asking it he could find no decent, not to say chivalrous escape. If he had been wooing Bessie Crandall for his wife, he could hardly have done more or other than he had been doing for nearly six weeks past. And now his family were imperatively summoning him. They had returned as far as Saratoga; and in this haunt of the well-dressed they found one escort for them all an insufficient allowance. He must have caught and eaten trout enough by this time to turn his brain into phosphorus; and really they could spare him no longer. He felt that he must go — at once, that is, to-morrow. This afternoon he would pass with Bessie.

As he went toward the house where he had spent so many pleasant hours, he felt himself a coward. Could he go away and not tell her the truth? Would any truth, however hard or cruel, be so ignoble as to depart, leaving her, if indeed she cared for him at all, a

prey to the vain expectations he had done his best to create? Would—but he paused. Fate must settle it all. Perhaps she did not care; and if so no harm was done. But all the while he was conscious of a wild, miserable longing to see the light of love in her eyes, and to kiss the sweet, sensitive mouth, trembling with its first words of tenderness for him. He went in, and found Bessie in the great cool parlor, fragrant with flowers. She was a creature of infinite variety,—coquettish sometimes, argumentative sometimes, serious sometimes, and never twice the same. This afternoon she was changeful and brilliant, and elusive as the humming-bird that flitted in and out of the rose-tree under her window. Her mood tortured him. If he was brutal, that torture perhaps was a slight excuse; but then brutality is so often the resource of a perplexed man. If he only knew whether she cared for him! If not, he might spare himself the confession he had to make; but how could he be sure?

He drew a picture from his pocket, a little miniature painted on ivory,—the face of a woman pure and proud and cold; “icily regular, splendidly null,” he had said to himself this very day as he looked at it in his own chamber.

“I believe I have never shown you this,” he said, handing it to Bessie; “do you think it handsome?”

“Your sister?” she asked, looking at the picture carelessly.

“No, my cousin, Miss Winifred Sturgis, whom I am engaged to marry.”

He had longed to know whether she cared for him ; but in that moment I think he would rather his doubt had remained unsolved.

She turned suddenly white to the very lips. As long as he lives he will never forget that momentary glimpse of her with all her young warmth and brightness gone, — a woman of stone. She was both proud and brave, and she would never lower her flag to the enemy. In a moment the color had come back to cheek and lips, and her voice did not even tremble as she answered quietly, "Yes, she is very handsome ; one of those beauties about whom there can be no question. I congratulate you."

He had been shocked when he saw that she suffered ; but now her swift composure piqued him, and he showed it in his tone as he replied, —

"I am not sure that I am ready to be congratulated. Marriage, at best, is an experiment."

"I think you are disloyal to your cousin," she said with a little scorn in her tone, "when you receive my congratulations in such doubtful fashion."

"Would to Heaven that were my only disloyalty !" he murmured in so low a voice that Bessie did not feel herself obliged to hear it. She led the conversation in quite other channels, and jested and mocked and sparkled, so that if he had not seen her white face of stone for that one revealing moment, he would have believed that she cared not at all for all the summer that was passed.

Dr. Crandall had returned before he went away, and

the parting was general. The next day Phelps went to join his cousin.

A profound student of human nature says that in marriage the certainty, "She will never love me much," is easier to bear than the fear, "I shall love her no more." It must be much the same with lovers. There had always been a vague, though possibly mistaken impression in Walter Phelps's mind that his cousin would never be very passionately in love with him; and that had never much troubled him. Passionate love he thought was not in the line of her temperament; and he had been well enough satisfied without it. Her grace and beauty had charmed his taste, her preference had flattered his pride; he had looked forward with pleasure to being the envied husband of a much-admired woman, whose very coldness was his security, since she was sure never to turn coquettish or light-minded on his hands.

But now a terrible fear beset him lest he should never be able to love her. He had not guessed how deep an impression Bessie had made on him until he felt how savorless the calm, faultless beauty of Winifred Sturgis had become. Involuntarily he was constantly contrasting her with Bessie; as at Riverside he had been trying Bessie by her standard. It was like passing from a gallery of paintings, alive with color and glow and brightness, into a hall of sculptured marbles, still and pure and white and, above all, cold. There are those who like the marbles best; who see in them a noble grace the more sensuous art of paint-

ing can never reach ; but Walter Phelps was not one of these. He missed Bessie's riant little face with its dark beauty, her gay laughter, her sudden moods of half-pathetic tenderness ; she was a woman, you perceive, after his own heart, while the homage he had paid to the other for so many years had been but the clear perception of his intellect.

He had never been used to self-control ; no experience had taught him to submit patiently to discomforts of mind or body. He was uncomfortable now ; and his boyish impulse was to run away from his uneasiness. He had not yet learned that trouble is like the ghost which had tormented a certain worthy family for years. The good wife finally concluded to move in order to escape him ; but when the last load of goods was on the van, a neighbor passed that way, and said, " So you 're moving ? " " Yes," cried the ghost, lifting from among the beds and cushions a voice of congratulation, — " yes, we 're *all* going." Walter Phelps had not learned that all maladies which are of the spirit have wings by right of birth, and will fly with us wherever we go. He thought Europe would have resources enough to put out of mind one little brown mocking face. He would try it. Miss Sturgis should go with him, if she would ; he could take her over to the old Greek marble women, with whom she seemed to belong. What if she should choose to turn into stone there, and live on forever in a white dream of beauty ? He laughed at his own conceit, and then went to his cousin.

With an altogether unflattering abruptness, he proposed to her to be married at once, and catch the next steamer for Europe. The mood to go was on him, — he had no patience with waiting; as for gowns and things, they were as plenty there as blackberries in New Hampshire.

Miss Sturgis was a thorough-bred, self-contained woman of the world; but she was neither without heart nor without perception. Whether the New Hampshire in his comparison suggested anything to her I do not know; but at any rate, she had no mind to be married in an unsentimental haste that did not even pretend to excuse itself by any passionate ardor of love.

She refused his proposal with quiet firmness; and I do not think he was at all sorry to start upon his travels alone.

Europe diverted him, however, less than he had expected. He spoke American French, and it did not open to him any wild delights of a social nature. For vulgar dissipation he had no taste. At that stage in his career he was, no doubt, selfish, ease-loving, good-for-naught; but he was always pure-minded. The balls of the *Jardin Mabille* only disgusted him; the salons of a society corresponding to his own in New York were not open to him. He liked painting and music and sculpture, all of them, with a mild good taste; not one of them was capable of giving him an intense emotion. He would have gone home in a year, had not the problem of his life waited at home for his solution. He sought for light on it in all the accus-

tomed directions, — he wintered in France to no purpose; he passed the next winter in Rome with no better success. A summer in Switzerland, and another in Northern Europe served him no farther; and at the end of the two years he returned, just as puzzled and uncomfortable a man as when he sailed away from New York.

Meantime Miss Sturgis had been thinking. Would a lover who loved her have stayed away two years? When he had asked her to go with him, had it not been with a make-the-best-of-it air?

These thoughts were in her mind when he called on her, and asked her if at last she was ready to name the wedding-day.

She looked at him with a curious expression of inquiry just touched, or at least he thought so, with scorn.

“This is sweetly courteous of you, I am sure,” she said in her cold, clear tones; “but I want to understand you perfectly. Do you ask me to be your wife because you love me with a love that would choose me out of all the world, or because, after our understanding in the past, honor constrains you?”

“It is late in the day to ask that question,” he said, with what indignant manhood he could summon, “now that you have been my promised wife for four years.”

She smiled, — a smile which promised him no consolation.

“Well, I will change the conditions, then. I am no longer your promised wife. I withdraw every pledge

I ever made you. Now, if you seek me, it must be afresh. You have thought me a cold woman; but I tell you that any man would marry me at his peril who could not give me the uttermost love of his heart. It would be a treason I could never forgive; I should be as inexorable as death. Do not speak one word more to me of marriage, unless you know in your own soul that you love me with a devotion that is absolute, exclusive, and for all time."

He had never come so near to doing just this thing as at that moment. The keen excitement of her mood had breathed life into this seeming statue. Her eyes shone with a new fire. A brilliant scarlet glowed on her cheeks. There were new tones in her well-bred voice. He had never found her so intoxicating. I think he would have thrown himself at her feet, but that he feared her. Possibly, also, he feared himself. It may be that he had self-knowledge enough to understand that when the excitement of this mood was over, and she had gone back to her old graceful and gracious repose, she would fail to satisfy him, as she did before. With Bessie forever blithe and bonny and beguiling in his memory, dare he swear that he loved Winifred absolutely, exclusively, and for all time?

He rose and bowed courteously.

"You have chosen," he said, "for what reason I am unable even to conjecture, to break the bonds that bound us, — to cast doubts upon a feeling you seemed in other days to find satisfactory. Against such caprice I am not skilled or patient enough to contend. I

will not torment you with entreaties; you shall be, as you have chosen, mistress of your own future."

He made his exit with dignity, as he thought. Her eyes followed him with a smile half scornful and wholly sad. "So go four years of a lifetime," she said to herself.

The very next afternoon found Mr. Phelps in Riverside. The image of Bessie had taken on new charms, now that to win her seemed possible. One woman had weighed him in the balance and found him wanting. There would be sweet and full amends in the greeting of this less judicial charmer, who had never seemed disposed even to criticise him. He found a cruel consolation in remembering the swift pallor that had overspread her face when he showed her Miss Sturgis's picture. All through his hurried journey he had been picturing to himself the sweetness of her welcome. How the young cheeks would crimson, the dewy eyes gleam and glow, the sweet mouth tremble! That there would be any difficulty, — that she might be estranged, or cold, or dead even, never once occurred to him. Two years had gone by, bringing change and experience to him, as was natural, but she — surely she must be still just that same half-open rosebud of a girl, like a flower in a picture that

"biddeth fair to blossom soon

But it never, never blossoms in this picture; and the moon
Never ceases to be crescent, and the June is always June!"

He went to see her at about the same hour on which he had seen her first. He knew the household ways.

They would be through tea; the doctor would have gone out; she would be alone. He would have the long twilight, the sweet summer evening, in which to make her happy, to sun himself in her soft joy. He half thought he should find her in the door, as he had seen her stand so often, white-robed and fair. But he saw no one when he drew near the house. For the first time he thought, "What if she were dead?" and shivered, as he knocked at the door. A new servant answered his summons, and his inquiry whether Miss Bessie was in.

He sent up his card, and then waited for her in the parlor below, his heart beating as no woman had ever made it beat before. She looked at the bit of pasteboard, and smiled. He had come again, then, — this man who held her heart in the hollow of his hand that other summer, and played with and pitied it "with a poor-thing negligence!" She took a sheet of paper and wrote on it: —

"Do not come to-night; I will tell you why to-morrow."

This she gave to her maid, with a few words of direction; and then looking a moment in the glass, — for who does not adjust his armor before going into battle? — she went downstairs.

She was not quite the Bessie Walter Phelps had expected to see; yet he could not have defined the change. Certainly she was not less beautiful. If anything, her sparkling, changeful face had gained in charm. But there was an added self-possession in her

manner, a new pride in voice and gesture. This was not a girl for any man to love, and then ride comfortably away. Nor, sincere as was his purpose, did he find it easy to tell her for what he had come. She had some new power over herself and others. She chose, for a while, to keep the conversation on indifferent subjects. She wished to take a fresh sense of this hero whose star had once ruled her heavens, — to see with her matured powers of perception what manner of man he was. Would he be able to stir her pulses with any of the old thrill? She thought not, — but he might try, if he chose; it would be well that she should be altogether sure of herself.

So at last she let him ask the question for the sake of which he had come. He was too much in earnest now for dainty gallantries. He asked her in a few plain words to be his wife; and she answered with a little spice of wickedness, for she was a very human creature, —

“But your cousin, Miss Sturgis? I supposed you had married her long ago.”

“No, Bessie, you had made that impossible. I only found out how well I loved you after I had left you. Winifred was too clear-sighted to be deceived, and when she guessed my secret, she gave me up. Never fear but I am honorably released. I am yours now, if you will have me.”

“I am afraid Mr. Robert Graves would object,” she said demurely.

“Who is Mr. Robert Graves?”

She answered with deliberate cruelty, bearing in mind the very words with which, two years before, he had turned her to stone, —

“My friend, whom I am engaged to marry.”

Walter Phelps was proud. There is pluck and courage in the *jeunesse dorée*. He too remembered the old time, the old words. “I congratulate you,” he said, as coolly as she had spoken the same words that other day.

“Thank you,” she answered; “I know Mr. Graves so well that I do not think my marriage will be an experiment.”

Just before he left her, his heart softened over her, and conquered his pride.

“I have loved you very dearly,” he said. “I did not guess how well in that old summer; but I knew afterward that I had never really cared for any other woman. Is it too much for me to ask, in the name of all I feel for you, whether you *love* this Mr. Graves?”

Her nature, always as exquisitely true as it was exquisitely tender, impelled her to the frank confidence which was all she could give him now. If he were really noble enough to rejoice in her happiness, she would make him sure of it.

“Yes,” she said with a grave, sweet seriousness; “I love Robert Graves. I was very near to loving you two summers ago; but I felt that you treated me ill. You had played with my heart for pastime, but it was a prouder heart than you knew. You had amused yourself with me, careless of what you might make me

suffer, while you yourself were engaged to another woman. When I knew the truth, it aroused against you my pride and indignation, and they cured my budding love. Since then I have known and loved Robert Graves, and he satisfies me entirely."

Walter Phelps looked at her in the soft summer dusk, — this fair woman who was not for him. He knew that he had sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, and that for him there was no place for repentance.

"God bless you for a sweet, true woman, whom-ever you marry!" he said fervently; and then he went away from her, in the twilight, out of the peaceful old house, out of the lilac-bordered yard, out of her life forever.

Rumor says that some time after that he tried to win back Winifred Sturgis and failed. She married his younger brother John, who had adored her with single-hearted devotion since that summer when he did escort duty at the Northern lakes in place of Walter the absentee. John has never been known to complain that his wife was cold. He prefers his stately white lily to any other man's ardent rose; and there are those who testify to having seen Mrs. John Phelps in her nursery, and heard her talk sweet, foolish, idle baby-talk as rapturously as any common mother of them all.

So you perceive our trifler wasted no one's day but his own in his pastime. The two women, neither of whom he quite knew how to love steadfastly, were happy in spite of him; and he, — we can afford to pity him, for he is very much alone.

Nor does he enjoy loneliness. Certain platitudes about love are much in fashion, implying that man's need of love is less than woman's; but there are men and men, as there are women and women. Walter Phelps is precisely the kind of man to covet domestic life. Dissipation does not attract him, for his nature is refined. He has money enough without looking for it, so he has not the excitement of business. He has no political ambition; nor has he the tastes of a student. A happy home is precisely what he needs; but he threw his chance for that away in his youth. Remembering the past, he has a vague idea what love is, and he is determined not to marry without it; so ever since he has been pursuing a hope that has constantly eluded him. He can never, try how he will, feel again the glow at his heart that warmed him when he waited that last day for Bessie in the old house at Riverside. Society has come at last to look with mild contempt upon his patient experiments.

I danced with him last night,—a well-preserved man of forty-five,—and I wondered if he, as well as I, heard an all-wise young chit of seventeen, in the insolent pride of youth and beauty, say to the pretty boy of twenty who was holding her fan,—

“Just see what airs he gives himself, that old beau!”

A CLOD OF THE VALLEY.

HOW sad the hills were in the sunset! Ruth Allen always thought so; and yet she loved to stand and look at them, as poets love pain, and musicians love minor chords in music. She had little time even for this sorrowful pleasure, for she was the hard-working wife of a New England farmer; and if she knew the hills well, it was not from sitting before them with camp-stool and easel, and trying to make their portraits, as a more fortunate woman with just her soul might have done, but from the chance glimpses that she caught of them at all hours.

She knew them well, for instance, at four o'clock in the morning. She was up then, beginning to get breakfast, and she saw the sun kiss the hill-tops and the day break forth into joy, and she heard the early birds say good-morning to one another. But the morning gladness seldom found much answer in her heart. Morning meant little to her except getting up before she was half rested, and beginning another hard day's work.

Sometimes on Sundays, when her day of comparative leisure came, her faith seemed kindled by the morning light, and she felt, in some vague way which

she could not have put into words, that on those hill-tops an unclothed soul might poise itself a moment for a last look at this old familiar earth, full of ploughed fields and mown meadows and toiling men and women, — a last look, and then fly, fly, fly, on, up, away, into what glories she hardly dared to think, only the dim vision of them quickened her tired pulses and made her draw a long breath, as if the freedom and the flight were begun already.

But these visions were only born on Sunday mornings; and at night she never saw anything in the hills but a place for graves. Perhaps she loved them best in that aspect. She had, by the time the hard day was done, no wings wherewith to fly, even in thought; no energy of desire to carry her soul upward. She longed only that some deep place of rest should open to her and infold her and let her sleep, sleep, sleep, and no cock should ever crow, and somebody else, not she, should get the early breakfast for the farm-hands, who were always so hungry.

This very day she had given them five meals, — their breakfast at five o'clock in the morning, a luncheon to carry into the fields with them for the middle of the long forenoon, a noonday dinner, a mid-afternoon snack, and now at last she had set out their hearty cold supper in the long low kitchen, and she might stand while they ate it, she thought, and see the last ray of the sunset fade and die behind those western hills, and breathe for a few moments freely. But just exactly then came her husband's voice, —

“Ruth, I wish you ’d come and make me a cup of tea.”

For a moment she thought she hated him. She never will forget that one moment of mad rebellion. What had she ever married him for, she wondered. Great strong lumbering man, who never cared to look at sunsets, and did n’t know what it was to be tired! A clod of the valley, — yes, a clod! She had caught the words from somewhere, and she said them over with much satisfaction. And yet she *had* loved him, if she would but have sent her thoughts backward.

He had been young and strong and handsome, and with a good farm of his own which his grandfather had left him; and Ruth, lonely orphan as she was, had been proud enough when he chose her out from among the other girls and asked her to be his wife. She seldom thought now of the young romance that clothed those far-off days. Ten hard-working years since had put romance effectually to flight. They say a time comes at the end of life when we remember all things, and the far-off seems the near. Perhaps in that twilight time, when the soul is gathering up its possessions and getting ready to depart, Ruth would remember, and walk again in the fields of memory where she had been joyfully wooed and gladly won. They seemed far enough behind her now, — those fields. She turned reluctantly toward the house. There was no grave as yet ready for her among the hills, and until she should find one, evidently there was no rest.

Was not the cold supper good enough, this hot night, and with quarts of milk to drink if they wanted it? She went to the back door, and Tom stood there leaning against it. Perhaps he was not quite so dull as she had been thinking him. He perceived the weary reluctance with which she came, and he said kindly, "It's too bad, Ruth! I did hate to ask you to make up a fire again; but I can't eat, and the shakes have got hold of me. I've been working down in the marsh-meadow, and I suppose I have got a chill."

Perhaps Ruth's heart was not quite dead within her, after all. She sprang to his side, and she could feel how he was trembling. His teeth chattered, and yet his hands seemed to burn her when she touched them. Her nature was one quick to take alarm. She was intensely frightened.

"I'm afraid you are very sick," she said; but he managed to laugh and say, No, he had got a bad chill, but her good tea would set him up, and he should be all right in the morning.

Ruth made the tea. Hot and strong it was, but it did not warm away that terrible internal chill. She watched all night beside him; and strangely enough, the one thought that kept her company and would not be got rid of was that she had called him, to herself, a clod of the valley. What if that was a prophecy; and if he would never be her strong Tom again, but only a clod among clods, and next year's grass should spring rank above him! She kept saying to herself, by way

of comfort, that she *had* been a good wife to him. It was only that lately she had had to work so hard that she had forgotten to love him. Surely she could forgive herself for that. And yet deep down underneath all her thoughts, she knew that she could *not* forgive herself, and that if Tom died her sin would be hateful in her sight forever.

He grew worse through the night. Toward morning he began to mutter disconnected words. Sometimes he would groan wearily, and say something that would show listening Ruth that if her life had been hard, so also had his. He had been working beyond his strength, just as she had beyond her weakness, to bring plentiful tribute to that deity of thrift and saving before which the New England farmer so often bows down and worships, though he calls his God by another name when he says his prayers.

With the early morning Ruth sent for the village doctor. The good old man looked grave. Tom had been working too hard, and the malaria in the marsh-meadow had soaked into him when he was tired and could not resist it, and he was in for a run of typhus.

“Will he die?” Ruth asked.

Dr. Holt looked at her and saw how white her lips were. He held a bottle up to the light, shook it, and dropped some drops from it into a spoonful of water, and made her take them before he answered her. Then he said, “You must see that he does n’t die. I sha’n’t send a nurse for him, for no one else would take such care of him as you will. But you must give

all your time to him. I'll send Matilda Fosdick to do your work. She is stronger than you are, and she'll be glad of a place, for I happen to know she is out of one just now; and she has n't a drop of lazy blood in her veins."

"But, doctor, she wants high wages. I can't afford —"

The doctor cut her short. "You can afford anything, I take it, better than that Tom should die; and it's *your* business to keep him alive, and to think about that and nothing else."

Dr. Holt had his way, — he usually did; and before noon Matilda Fosdick was quietly getting the men's dinner, and Ruth was watching beside her husband in their cool, shadowy chamber, where she had slept so many short nights through beside him, to waken, tired and self-pitiful, at the crowing of the morning cock, and begin her work again.

She never remembered now whether she was tired or not. She had only one thought, — would Tom live, or would he go to that wide-armed, infinite rest of which she used to dream, and leave her to be that loneliest of God's poor creatures, a childless widow? Tom did not know her at all in those long watches. Sometimes he would call her, and then he would say wearily, "She can't come; she's always busy. Poor Ruth!"

Perhaps he *had* been sorry for her through it all, Ruth thought, though she had never been sorry for him. Surely he had not meant to be unkind, only it

was the custom of the farmers' wives to do their own work, when they were young and well, and to toil indoors even more steadily than their husbands did in plough-field or hay-field. Only in Ruth's case she, herself, had been a kind of mistake. She should have been born into another world, where people made poems and pictures and music, and she would have found some part for herself to take there; for surely she had not been suited (she, with her slight figure and her haunting dark eyes and her low voice, like the voices that speak to us in dreams) for a life of toil and moil, beginning at four o'clock in the morning and ending only at bedtime, — a life of cooking and washing and making butter and scouring kitchen floors. And yet she loved Tom. She had forgotten that she loved him when he was busy and strong and she was busy and tired; but she remembered it well enough now, when he lay there burned up with fever, and more likely than not never to speak to her again.

Once she went away from his bedside, at midnight, and looked out of the window at the hills she loved. The moon was in the west, and it hung low over the hill-tops, full and bright and revealing, — as moonlight can be revealing, — not with the pitiless, mocking glare of day, that seems to say, "Look and see all things; there is nothing hidden that I do not make known;" but with that subtler revelation that leads the soul on into un conjectured spaces and new worlds.

Ruth's heart beat fast, and a sudden rush of tears filled her eyes. Tom had been ill two weeks then.

What would the end be? Was he going out by and by into this moonlit, unknown world, and would she lose him thus forever, and never find him again in the whole of endless eternity, because she had not loved him enough? Just then his voice reached her ear, and it sounded like the voice that had wooed her in summer twilights of long ago.

"Pretty little Ruth," it said. "Come, Ruth."

Was he, then, sane at last, and did he know her? She went to the bed, and the light of the night-lamp shone upon her face. Tom glanced at her eagerly, and then an impatient look came into his eyes.

"I wanted Ruth," he said, "my little Ruth; but she is always too busy to come, always;" and then he began to murmur vaguely, and she saw that his mind *was* again whirling, whirling in that whirlpool of delirium which had caught and held it, and seemed as if it would never let it go.

And four weeks more went on and brought no comfort. Dr. Holt's face grew graver with every visit. Ruth's very soul seemed failing within her. She had no father or mother or child; she had only Tom. A shadow of great darkness grew round her. She shrank from the desolation to come, as one shrinks from a cold, sleet-laden wind. If only Tom could come back from this City of Dreadful Night where he was wandering, would she think any task too hard?

Again the moon was full. The summer had gone by, and it was the harvest moon which hung low in the western sky. Dr. Holt was asleep upstairs. In

his evening visit he had said that the fever would turn before morning, and they should know whether the end would be life or death. He would stay, so as to be within instant reach of any call. He was no longer young, and he needed rest, so he would go to sleep till he was wanted. Ruth alone was wakeful as usual. Tom was sleeping, as he had been for many hours. When he came out of that sleep they would know what was to be his fate.

Again Ruth leaned from the window and watched the hills clothed with the splendor of the moonlight. And the moon revealed farther and farther depths of worlds beyond worlds. These hills it blessed and shone on were no places of graves to-night. They were, indeed, as she had thought on Sunday mornings, coigns of vantage, whence the soul might sigh farewell, and take its far, glad flight. But not yet—oh, God grant, not yet! And as she watched, Tom's voice came to her, weak and faint, but his own natural voice, —

“Ruth, little woman, your tea did me good. Have you been watching here all night, poor tired Ruth?”

All night! Ay, *what* a night,—six weeks of night! And now was the morning come? She stole trembling to the bedside and looked into Tom's honest eyes, quite free now from the flame of fever which had burned in them so long. *Was* he safe, after all?

“Oh, Tom!” she cried, and then her long-tried strength gave way, and she sank on her knees, and began to sob wildly.

"Heigh, heigh! this will never do!" said Dr. Holt's voice. No one had called him, but he had a true doctor's knack of awaking just at the right time. "This *won't* do! You have saved my patient's life, and now I can't have you kill him."

"Have I been very sick, then?" asked wondering Tom.

"Well, rather. You have n't known a human creature for six weeks, and that little woman there has just watched you night and day like an angel, — no, I mean like a woman; and you owe it to her if you ever get off this bed."

"Get off this bed! Of — course — I — 'll" — but Tom was sound asleep again, and did not say what he would do. But I know what he did do, afterward. He found out during his long convalescence that Ruth had qualities of her own besides a pretty face and a good temper; and that she was worth far more as companion than she could be as housemaid; and before his wife had even guessed at his intention, he had hired Matilda Fosdick to stay on indefinitely, and do the hard, heavy housework, which had been sadly too much for poor little Ruth. He settled it all quietly, and told of it afterward.

"But, Tom!" said Ruth.

"But, Ruth," answered Tom, "*I* know what is right. We have money enough to be comfortable, and why should we not be so? Plenty of women can make butter and scour floors, but no one else can be Ruth; and I want Ruth to have a fair chance

to be herself, and to make flowers grow instead of potatoes."

And, do you know, I don't think Tom had ever been a clod of the valley after all, but only a thrifty New England farmer, to whom it had not once occurred to think that one woman had different needs and different powers from another; that as to money, enough is as good as a feast; and that he himself could possibly lead a somewhat different life from that of his fathers before him.

A STORY OF PLANCHETTE.

“**T**RY it on, Mrs. Everett.”

“It” was a graceful little head-dress which Dot Shapleigh had been making. Mrs. Everett was a widow, a dozen years older than this little Dot who was visiting her for a few days, though Dot’s home was only three-quarters of a mile away.

Dot had a peculiar knack for head-dresses, and such bits of fancy millinery. She had twisted the just completed violet wreath round her own bright hair, and Mrs. Everett had looked at her and admired — as unsatisfied women past thirty do look at and admire pretty young girls — with something of tenderness, and something of a sad, bitter envy which they keep to themselves. She took in at that glance all the fresh loveliness of the face which the violets crowned, — eyes which were sister violets; soft hair of bronze gold; fresh yet delicate color; bright laughing lips; cheeks forever breaking into dimples.

Not too much of either mind or soul in the fair face as yet, but just that glowing, fascinating beauty of youth which women of Constance Everett’s age look back to, and prize far beyond its true worth.

Dot took off the wreath.

"Do try it," she urged. "It's your color since you've left off black. I think it will just suit you; and if it does, you shall have it."

Mrs. Everett received it on her fingers and went to the glass with it. She put it on her hair, — that hair which had been so pretty once, but into which the silver threads were creeping fast. Presently she took it off and laid it down, her eyes darkening with some sudden pain.

"No, it does not suit me. Nothing suits me now. All the good looks I ever had are gone. Oh, Heaven! to grow old so fast, so fast, and never in this life to have known what happiness is! Why does God make women with hearts, and then starve them?"

Dot took courage to ask a question she had often wished but never dared to ask before.

"You married for love, did you not, Mrs. Everett?"

"I thought so. Certainly there was little else to tempt me. My husband was neither a great man nor a rich one. But it was all over with so soon. He tired of me first. If he had not, perhaps I should not have found out so early that I did not love him. But the knowledge must have come in any case, I think, as I learned to understand myself. Before a year was over we were both thoroughly disenchanted; and yet we lived on together, just to please society, which concerned itself little enough about us, for ten years, — ten *such* years. How I grew to dread the sound of his voice or the sight of his face! His presence used to

make me ill. I nerved myself to bear the regulation amount; but if he stayed half an hour longer than usual in the morning I was sick for the day."

"And at last he died?"

"Yes, when he was away from home. I was spared the misery of seeing him at the end. I hope he is happy now. I never wished him ill at any moment of my life. All I wanted was to be out of his sight, as I have been for three years."

"And even now you are not happy?" Dot suggested daringly.

Mrs. Everett was in a communicative mood, rare with her, and was not offended.

"No; how can I be? I am thankful for freedom, indeed, but I am all alone in the world. I think love is the supreme thing in life, and no one loves me."

"I love you," Dot said cooingly.

"You! Yes, child, when your lover is not by. How often would you think of me when his arm was round you? I tell you only the one genuine thing satisfies a woman. Everything else is husks. And I am growing old so fast. I think it will never come to me now."

Dot Shapleigh looked at her companion in surprise. Mrs. Everett was not conventional or artificial. Rules and precedents did not weigh greatly with her. But she was a woman of singular pride and singular reserves,—not at all given to sowing her confidences broadcast, or sowing them at all, for that matter. Dot could never have fancied her saying such words,

—making such admissions. Dear as they had been to each other, there had been a boundary set between them hitherto, which she had never thought of trying to cross.

Dot admired Mrs. Everett very much. There was in her a passionate strength and a high-bred repose which no girl of eighteen ever has in combination, and which fascinated this girl. Constance Everett had her own loveliness too, whose charm had not “passed with the dull years away.” Her eyes had lost some of their old light, — smiling eyes they had been once, — but they were full now of a deep, longing tenderness which had a spell of its own. Her soft, drooping hair was lovely still, even despite the silver threads; and her face had grown clear and fine with suffering. But the young-girl beauty had departed from it forever; and this same young-girl beauty is what a woman growing toward middle age, who has missed what she most wanted in life, sorrows for, and cannot be comforted because it is not.

Dot sat silently for a while, wondering how her friend had come to utter thus the longing of her soul, — her friend usually so self-contained and so proud. Then she fell to wishing there were some way to penetrate the mysteries of the future, to wring from the yet-to-come its secret. If she could only know whether Mrs. Everett would some time be happy! Suddenly a thought crossed her mind, and she turned round in her pretty, eager way, and asked a question, —

“Did you ever see Planchette, Mrs. Everett?”

It was in the September of 18—, and Planchette had not yet begun to figure in every window and on every counter.

“No; I have heard of it, however,” Mrs. Everett answered carelessly. “A great humbug, is it not?”

“I wish I knew. Aunt Margaret brought mine from Germany. I tried it, and found I could write with it, and soon it began to tell me such strange things that I dared not keep it for a plaything, and so hid it away. Only think, it told me about Harry before we were engaged at all.”

“It answered to your thought, I suppose,” Mrs. Everett said with a tolerant smile.

“Perhaps so; but it said some things I had never thought of. At any rate, I should like you to try it. I have time to go home for it and get back before dark. May I? Will you try it with me? Harry won’t come to-night, and we shall have a quiet time.”

“Well, if you don’t mind the walk. We might amuse ourselves in that way as well as another. In the mean time I’ll have a fire built, and tea made ready, and dress myself in honor of the occasion; but I give you fair warning, — no matter what it writes, I shall not believe it.”

Just before nightfall Dot came back, bringing a box which she deposited with an air of mysterious importance on the parlor table, but which she would not open until tea was over.

After supper they returned to the pleasant drawing-room. The lamps were bright. The soft coal-fire

burned brilliantly. The crimson curtains were drawn ; Mrs. Everett — all the passion and longing which had looked out of her eyes in the afternoon entirely banished from them now — sat down with an air of superb indifference under the hanging-lamp in the centre of the room, the soft folds of her violet silk falling about her, her filmy handkerchief upon her lap, on which her idle hands were crossed.

Dot's cheeks were pink with excitement. She folded and cut large sheets of paper, and then she adjusted her little heart-shaped oracle.

"You will put your hand on it, please. Planchette, I am going to consult you for Mrs. Everett."

Mrs. Everett put out one white hand lazily, — it was the one with her wedding-ring on it, — and leaned back in her chair with closed eyes.

Vaguely at first the pencil moved over the paper, then more and more swiftly, and at last it began to write very rapidly. At length, with a sudden line drawn quite across the sheet, it stopped, and the paper was pushed toward Mrs. Everett.

"Read it ; it is for you," Dot cried excitedly ; and with the same air of indolent indifference, Mrs. Everett opened her eyes and obeyed. But as she read, the indifference passed away from her manner. Her cheeks grew pale as death, her limbs shook, for this was what she found written : —

For Heaven's sake, for my soul's sake, accomplish your happiness somehow. I am doomed to wait beside you until you are made happy. I do not love you. I do not want to

stay here. But I must watch over you and care for you until some one takes my place who feels for you all I ought to have felt and did not.

JOHN EVERETT.

"Do you know what it says?" Mrs. Everett asked in tones so constrained and husky that they fell strangely upon her own ears.

"No," Dot answered.

"Then I had rather you would not. If you please, I will keep this sheet. If these words were not written by some haunting spirit, I know not how they came upon the paper. Let us say no more about it. I think I will go to my room if you don't mind. I am tired."

Dot noticed how deathly white her face was as the lamplight shone on it; how cold her lips were when she kissed her good-night. After she had gone out of the room, the girl put Planchette again into her box, and tied her in with a ribbon.

"There you go, whatever you are, good or bad spirit, or no spirit at all; and you won't get out again in a hurry," she said, with a little vexed determination in her voice, as she tied the last knot.

Mrs. Everett drew a chair in front of the fire upon her hearth, and sat down to think. For three years she had believed herself free; but instead, if this strange oracle told the truth, all the time this brooding Presence had been beside her, waiting his time and means to make himself known, and from him she saw no escape. His doom was her doom as well; and it seemed to close round her with the blackness of de-

spair. He was to wait till her happiness was accomplished, — a happiness which would never come. Her only hope was in the one sure fate of mortals. Some day she should die ; and then the sudden shudder of a new foreboding shook her. Would he be commissioned to haunt her still, when they were both immortal?

She crept to bed, and lay there trembling till at last sleep came ; but it was a feverish sleep, beset with dreams and visions, which brought her little rest.

After this night, watching herself and her life with perhaps a morbid, introverted closeness of observation, she grew slowly conscious, as she believed, of a mysterious influence which changed her plans, and regulated in spite of her own will her movements, — conscious, too, that the influence seemed to work always for her good. It gave her no sense of tenderness, but only of watchfulness, — like a grim nurse who never smiles over her childish charge, or kisses it, but who guards it from danger like an earthly providence.

The atmosphere of this unloved and unloving care was singularly oppressive to her. She grew feverish and restless. At length, in November, she made up her mind to go away from home. Change of place might bring change of pain, if no more. She longed for motion, — to see new sights, hear new sounds ; and she had possibly a childish hope that she might run away from her unseen companion. It might be part of his doom to stay in the old places, — who knew?

She grew more cheerful as she packed her trunks ; but once on her journey, the old sense of a doom from which she could not escape came over her. She knew as well that the Presence was beside her as if she could have heard him speak. She hurried from town to town, from hotel to hotel ; and she knew that he went with her, watching, silent, uncomplaining as unloving.

At last, in the middle of winter she fell ill in a strange city. Oppressed by this sense of constant and undesired companionship, she had been wasting to a shadow. Her heart beat its funeral march like no muffled drum, but as if terribly in earnest. Now strength failed her utterly, and there was nothing for her to do but to lie still and be ministered unto.

She knew that she must have a physician. There is a sense of the fitness of things which constrains an invalid who cares ever so little about life to die decently and in order. So she sent for a business directory and listlessly turned over its leaves. She lingered a little upon the name of Felix Adriance, precisely because it was such a singular and unmedical sounding name. While she looked at it she heard no voice ; but by some sense, so new to us as yet that our language has no word for it, she perceived that something said to her, " Send for Dr. Adriance. He is the right one, the only one who can help you."

It was the first time she had ever been conscious of any words from the haunting Presence at her side save the one message written by Planchette ; but any-

thing which broke the monotony of that silent watchfulness seemed to her less terrible than the watchfulness itself. She felt her courage rise; and to this something which had spoken, she made answer with a note of defiance in her tone, "No; I'll not send for him. I'll send for Dr. Matthew Strong. I like his name, and I'll have him."

Half an hour afterward, her messenger returned, and said to her, "Dr. Adriance will be with you very soon."

"But I did not send for Dr. Adriance. I sent for Dr. Strong."

"Yes, madam, but Dr. Strong is out of town, and Dr. Adriance takes his patients."

Just then, through that strange, unnamed sense, she was conscious of an eerie laugh, a laugh of ghostly triumph. She felt as if her fate were being taken quite out of her own hands. It had made no difference whether she sent for Dr. Adriance or Dr. Strong. Nothing she could do would make any difference probably; as well give up all further attempt to contend with this power, whatever it might be, which was settling her ways for her.

In fifteen minutes more Dr. Adriance was shown into the room.

He had a singular face, not American in its type, though, after all, assimilation has made all types American. Her very first thought about him was that he looked like a man who could see ghosts. He had wonderful eyes, — black, large, far-seeing, and full of

smouldering fire. His long black hair fell carelessly about a massive, strong forehead. His nose expressed pride and refinement. His lips were firm and sweet. His chin, which no beard concealed, was the cleft, Napoleonic chin with which the busts and pictures of the first Napoleon have made us all familiar.

He came in with the air of a man perfectly at ease in his position, and waiting a moment until they were alone, sat down by Mrs. Everett's side, and took her feverish hand.

"Now," he said, looking with a kind of compelling power into her eyes, "first of all, I want you to tell me the whole cause of this highly nervous state in which I find you; otherwise I cannot help you."

She looked at him a moment in return, gathering confidence as she looked, and feeling strangely impelled to confide in him entirely. But at last she asked a question instead —

"Can you exorcise a ghost?"

He gazed at her then more intently than before. Was this a mad woman whom he had been sent for to cure? No. Her eyes had no baleful fire in them. They were sadder than any eyes he had ever seen, but calm as they were sad. He determined to answer her as seriously as she had spoken.

"I have never tried my power in that direction, and I do not know what I could do. I have never seen a ghost; have you?"

"No, but I have felt the power of one."

And then she told him her story.

He listened with grave seriousness. When she was through, he said, —

“Dr. Strong would have laughed your ghost to scorn, Mrs. Everett, and given you iron to take. He is the most determined unbeliever in the supernatural I ever knew ; but I am not prepared precisely to follow his course. Your story, as you tell it, gives me a curious impression of reality. May I ask you one more question?”

“Yes.”

“Did this man wrong you in any way, or can you account, on any theory of probability, for his being doomed to watch over you, when he is not drawn to you by love?”

“No, I do not think he wronged me. Our marriage was a mutual mistake. Perhaps he was the first to find this out ; but that was scarcely his fault.”

Just then she stopped, and a singular expression crossed her face. She wore the look of an absorbed listener. She motioned Dr. Adriance to silence, and for a moment neither spoke.

Then she asked, “Did you hear anything?”

“No.”

“It is not hearing, exactly ; but I was as conscious as I could be of anything you should say to me that the ghost was giving me his explanation of his doom. He says his sin was in being purely selfish, in caring nothing for what I had to suffer, while he brooded sullenly upon his own disappointment. For that reason

he must watch over me now, and wait for his happiness until I have found mine."

Dr. Adriance heard her through in silence.

"This may be true," he said, after a thoughtful pause. "I have heard things as strange testified to by witnesses so unimpeachable that I was not left at liberty to doubt."

"If his presence were a help and a comfort to me," she said slowly, "it would all be reasonable enough. But when I had so longed to escape from him, to have him sent back after death to prolong my torture seems strange mercy."

"May it not be," Dr. Adriance suggested gently, "that there is a lesson for you as well as for him? He is to earn his happiness by trying to help you to yours. May it not be, on your part, that you are to learn *not* to long to escape from him, to learn gratitude and toleration for him instead? I think sometimes that all creation will be out of harmony so long as any two of the Father's children hate each other. Let us hope now that you have shared your secret with me, you may feel less oppressed by this constant Presence. I will give you nothing more than a soothing draught to-night, and see you again in the morning."

That night, for the first time in months, Mrs. Everett slept. Was it that the doctor's draught was a veritable elixir of life; or was it the inexplicable relief which grew out of sharing her secret with another? At any rate, she slept as peacefully as a child; and

when she woke in the morning, no sense of ghostly companionship oppressed her.

"Did I exorcise the ghost?" the doctor asked, on his early visit.

"Possibly. At any rate he has not troubled me."

"And you slept?"

"I slept."

She gave him a cool hand, and the pulse on which he pressed his fingers beat evenly. He looked into her face, which her tranquil rest had refreshed, and just then began to realize that she was a very interesting woman. About her beauty perhaps most men would be likely to use the past tense; but for him it had lost none of its attraction through the years that had left, in lieu of every charm they stole, something subtler and finer.

There was not much for medicine to do in her case, it struck him. The strength which a nameless dread had sapped must be built up slowly. The great thing to be accomplished was to divert her thoughts from the one subject on which they had so long and so morbidly dwelt,—to make her feel that however real her ghostly visitant might be, there was nothing terrible about him, commissioned as he was to right wrongs instead of to commit them.

Dr. Adriance had dabbled somewhat in psychology, and Mrs. Everett seemed to him the most interesting study he had ever met. He was not ready to throw away his opportunities, though he had too much honesty to give her medical attendance which she did

not need. So, as coolly as if it were the simplest and most common thing in the world for a doctor to make unprofessional visits, he said, —

“ Your illness is not of such a nature as to require a physician’s frequent attendance. When you do need me in a medical capacity, I will come in that way ; but, if you will allow me, I will come daily, during your stay here, as a friend ; and together we will see if we cannot keep your intimate enemy from troubling you. I confess the whole thing interests me intensely, and with your permission I should like to see it through.”

Constance Everett was too unconventional and too much in earnest, to find anything strange in this proposal, which was just such an one as she would have made herself, had the case been reversed.

She thanked him cordially ; and it became a settled thing that after his morning round of visits was over, he should go to her for an hour or more, as time served him.

The advantage of this new and pleasant companionship made itself felt at once. Mrs. Everett grew more cheerful. The tone of her mind seemed restored. She could eat and sleep. She became able to interest herself once more in art and literature and music and the affairs of the great world around her. But if Dr. Adriance had expected to pursue his acquaintance with the ghost, he was certainly disappointed. His patient seemed to herself to be delivered from the haunting Presence which had accompanied her so long. At least, if still it watched and waited, it made no sign.

Dr. Adriance, on his part, found himself looking forward to these daily visits of his as he had seldom looked forward to anything before. It was like entering a new world, after a morning spent in listening to the querulous complaints of his patients, to go into the quiet room where was only peace, where always flowers bloomed, and a fair, graceful woman, simply clad, and all unconscious of her own charm, waited with eyes growing every day more glad to bid him welcome.

He brought to her all that was best in himself, — his professional ambition, his philanthropy, his tastes; and there was nothing in which he failed of her comprehension or her sympathy.

Day by day she grew stronger and brighter. If she had been a vainer woman, she might herself have seen how the glow and glory of her lost youth were creeping back into her face. But perhaps her unconsciousness was not her least grace. She thought of herself still as a woman older than her years, saddened by the long hunger of her life, powerless to win anything for which she pined; but even in spite of this, life began to grow a brighter thing for her. She felt that it was not impossible that some time, in and of herself, and quite apart from outside influences, she might be happy. Then, surely, even if he had not gone already, the Presence would depart from her life.

With her returning strength she began to think of going home. "Winter's rains and ruins were over," and a breath of spring was in the air, as well as in her heart.

A few times Dr. Adriance drove her out into the country, where wild flowers were springing under the hedges, where brooks babbled, and tender, green leaves were sprouting from the trees.

On one of these drives she told him that next week she had planned to go home. He made no remonstrance, for he saw clearly that there was nothing which could reasonably be urged against her intention. Her health had improved wonderfully. She seemed as likely to live now as three months before she had seemed likely to die. Her own home, in the pleasant suburbs of an eastern city, was at once a more suitable and more attractive place for her, now that the spring days were growing long. She had been a pleasant friend to him, but the time had come when they must part. Dr. Adriance had passed through partings enough, in the thirty-five years which had left him alone in the world, not to make much ado about this one.

It came hardest on her, Mrs. Everett thought, when she saw his composure. She had been to him a patient, in the singularity of whose case he took a personal interest. He had been, to her, doctor and friend in one. Well, at any rate, parting-time had come, and she had to thank him for having made of her life such a different thing from what it had been when she knew him first. All this strength and courage with which she looked out now upon the world were of his planting.

When the day of her departure arrived, he took

her to the train. They were silent during the short drive, for the most part. How is it that the thousand last things one has to say will never get themselves said under such circumstances? At length, just as they neared the station, she put into his hand a card, on which she had written out her address.

"Will you come some time?" she asked, and waited for his answer with an eagerness which flushed her cheeks and brightened her eyes.

"Thank you, yes; the very first vacation I am able to take."

"If you do not forget me in the mean time," she said, with just the least little touch of womanly spleen, because she had persuaded herself that she was feeling their parting more acutely than he did.

"Yes, if I do not," very coolly. "But I have a long memory for most things and most people."

"Well, I am one of the many, surely. So if you remember most people, my chance is good."

"Very good, I think."

Evidently her petulance amused him. He smiled a quiet smile over it as he lifted her from the carriage.

The train was almost due. There were five minutes of confusion, during which he had purchased her ticket, procured her checks, found her a seat on the shady side, and said good-by. Then, from the window of the car which whirled her away, she watched him till he seemed but a speck.

Was it all, all over? Would she see him again sometime, or never any more? *He* had taken it all quietly

enough, she thought; but somehow *she* did not find it exhilarating.

Her spirits began to rise, however, as she neared her home. She found it bright with spring, well kept and well cared for by the faithful woman whom she had left in charge; and she found, waiting to welcome her, Dot, who was Dot Shapleigh no longer, but a very pretty little Mrs. Prescott.

"You see, after all, I did think of you when I was with my lover," Dot said, holding up her face to be kissed.

"When you were with your husband, dear, — a slightly different thing," Mrs. Everett retorted with a sort of half-sad satire in her voice.

"No, not with me," Dot cried earnestly. "We are more lovers than ever, as you'll see; for you'll have to see a good deal of us. And Harry has a brother, whom you must see too. He is with us on a visit. He is Colonel Prescott; and he has on his cheek the scar of a sabre-wound, — a real hero."

Mrs. Everett looked into Dot's transparent little face and laughed.

"You are an astute match-maker," she said. "Could not you be a married woman, dear, without taking on the worst faults of your order?"

Dot blushed.

"No, I'm not a match-maker; only the colonel is in his thirties, and Harry and I have thought sometimes that you would just charm him, and you could n't help liking him, I know; so what sin would it be if it

should happen to prove that you were made for each other?"

"No sin in life, little matron; only there's nothing in the world less likely to happen. I'm not at all sure now that I can't be happy without love. It no longer seems to me the only thing in the world."

"Well, you'll see him this evening, at any rate. Harry is going to bring him. Harry said it was n't fair to call when you had just got here, but I overruled him. I felt sure you would n't mind."

Mrs. Everett found herself making her toilet that evening with real interest; and when all was done, she looked a lovely lady, in the trailing violet silk she was so fond of wearing, with cobweb laces at throat and wrists, and a bright flower in her dusky hair. Dot's young-girl beauty paled before the ripe charm of this mature woman, to whom years of suffering had taught so many lessons.

And yet Dot was very pretty too in her own way; and her bright face grew yet brighter when the door-bell rang, and her big, blond, good-natured giant of a husband came in with his soldier brother.

The two men whom Mrs. Everett was prepared to find as like as two peas were, in fact, very different. Colonel Prescott was both slighter and darker than his brother. There was a look of command in his clear eyes. His even voice, too, had something of force in it, to which it seemed natural to yield, though his tones were low and quiet. His features were clear in their outline, and his lithe figure promised strength and en-

duration; "a born soldier," one would have said, to look at him.

He conversed chiefly with Mrs. Everett; for the time was not over for Dot and her big husband when they liked best to entertain each other.

What he said was not so much as the manner in which he said it. They talked about many things; but when Mrs. Everett tried afterward to recall what had passed, she saw that he had rather drawn her out than expressed his own opinions. Yet on one or two vital points he *had* spoken strongly. There was in his manner a blending of deference toward her as a woman, and respect for himself as a man, which seemed to her a rare combination. Then, with all his strength, he did everything more gently than other men. He had a habit of alert and minute attention to details, the result of his military training, possibly. His eyes were everywhere. No trifle was wanting to her comfort that he did not instantly perceive it. He drew a screen between her face and the soft coal-fire; he turned her music; he handed her tea-cup; but all with a certain grave gentleness, as far as possible removed from the bearing of a squire of dames. When he went away, she was obliged to confess to herself that Dot's soldier brother-in-law was a success.

He became after that night quite a frequent visitor. At first Dot usually came with him. Then he began to go over alone in the mornings, while his little sister-in-law was busy, to hear Mrs. Everett sing; and finally it came about that on one pretext or another,

he made daily visits, and almost always made them alone.

It was inevitable that Constance Everett should contrast him sometimes with the other friend who had also been a daily visitor, and who seemed to have worked in her behalf some strange miracle of healing. They were both good men and true, but alike in scarcely one thing. Both had power, but it was Dr. Adriance's nature to take a good deal for granted,—to carry matters with a high hand. Colonel Prescott persuaded, with that low, even voice of his; and she could not tell to which it was hardest to say no. Sometimes she wondered how much or how little either of them cared for her. From Dr. Adriance she had never heard one word since they parted that spring day; but if looks and tones went for anything, he had surely been something warmer and closer to her than her physician. Colonel Prescott was her friend; but would he, would any man, care to be more than that, considering the many tears that had washed the color and brightness from her life?

At last the colonel solved her doubts by asking her in so many words to be his wife. His leave of absence was almost out, and he wanted to take her away with him.

She had so little vanity that the proposal came to her as a surprise, and she asked a few days to consider it. That he loved her, his strong, manly words left her no room to question; and no one can guess how temptingly sweet this knowledge was, save a

woman no longer young who has fancied herself past her time for winning love.

But what did she feel for him? She had made one grand mistake in her life ; let her not make another.

She admired and appreciated Colonel Prescott ; she was proud of his devotion. Why did it not stir her pulses? Why, her heart had beat a quicker tune when Dr. Adriance came in to make his professional visits, — Dr. Adriance, who did not love her at all. Would any one ever love her, if she sent this true heart away? How could she decide?

While these doubts tormented her, she became conscious, for the first time in months, that the ghost, influence, spirit — choose what term you will — had not left her. He was there still, — always watching, never tender. She felt him in the very air ; and the voice which before in some occult way had penetrated her senses came to her again, saying, this time, over and over, only one word, "*Beware!*"

Beware of what? — lest she should throw away the only chance life held for her, in rejecting this love, so much more noble and generous than she had ever expected to win, or beware lest she make another mistake in accepting it? She did not know ; and question how she might, only the one word came in answer.

At last, one morning, she sent her little hand-maiden with a note for Dot. As a last resort she had thought of Planchette. She wrote to beg Dot to bring it over, and try for her once more. Little matronly Mrs.

Dot returned with the messenger, bringing her Pandora's box in her hand.

"Then you have ceased to shrink from my black witch, dear Mrs. Everett?" she asked, as she untied the ribbon she had knotted in that same drawing-room so many months ago.

"Yes, I shrink from nothing so much as the responsibility of my own actions."

Planchette was coy. She drew some circles, a cross, a star. When at last she wrote, her words were few, —

"You should know, by this time, what ~~your heart needs~~. If you are not satisfied that you have found it, wait. If you are satisfied, well."

Constance Everett read the few words twice over, and then folding the paper, put it into her pocket.

"Is it enough, dear?" Dot ventured to ask.

"It must be. I should get nothing more if I tried all day. Thank you."

"I think you have been asked to be my sister. The colonel has not told me, but I guess it. Will it come to that? You know how more than happy it would make *me*."

"Ask me after to-morrow, not now."

And so Mistress Dot carried her Planchette away unsatisfied; and Constance Everett was left alone, feeling that her mystery was still unsolved.

She continued to feel so until the next day, when Colonel Prescott came for his answer. Then she spoke

to him upon an impulse, and without hesitation, but out of her most secret and profound consciousness.

"I hoped I could love you," she said, "because I esteem and trust you so entirely, and I long for love so much. It has been the one thing I have missed all my life. I thought I could feel it for almost any good man who cared for me; but I have found my mistake. I admire you, am proud of you, and grateful to you beyond words for your tenderness; but I do not love you."

Colonel Prescott had never been more tender or gentle to her than just then. With all his pride, he was too humble, as well as too manly and too unselfish, to be angry, and too strong and brave himself to make her task harder by any weak complaints.

"Thank you," he said, "that you have been true enough to your own instincts to understand yourself, and deal honestly with me. It is bitter enough to give you up, but not so bitter as it would be to be your husband, and not have your love."

So he went away from her, her friend; and the next day he left town.

Then, when it was all over, the reaction came, and she suffered keenly. What she had longed for so vainly had been just within her grasp; for at least this man had loved her truly. And now he was gone.

In the midst of this mood of discontent and despondency, Dr. Adriance came to her.

"Did you send for me? Did you want me?" he asked with his first greeting.

"At any rate, I did not expect you," she said, smiling.

"But I think you sent for me. I felt your messenger's presence. He gave me no peace. It was not a convenient time for me to come, but I came. Do you need me, now I am here? Have you wanted me?"

The reason why she had been unable to love Colonel Prescott dawned just then upon Mrs. Everett.

"Yes, I believe I *have* wanted you. I did not let myself think about it; but the want *was* there."

"And I felt it, and I am here," he cried triumphantly; "and now *I* want *you*. Did you know when you went away from me that I loved you?"

"No, you did not tell me; how should I?"

"For your own sake I kept silence. I understood myself well enough. I knew I should never marry any other woman, but I would not take advantage of the circumstances. You had seen no one else for all those months, and you thought I had done you good. It seemed to me it would be easy for you to mistake friendship and gratitude for something deeper, if I told you what I felt for you then. When you had been quite away from me for a while, I thought you could be sure of yourself; but you were too dear for me to let you run any risks. I meant to have waited yet longer before coming to you; but, as I told you, your messenger summoned me. And now I am here, and I love you, *love* you."

She looked doubtfully for a moment into his eager eyes.

"Are you *sure?*" she asked softly. "I am not young any more. Sorrow has eaten away the best years of my life, and turned my hair gray, and stolen all that might have pleased you once. Are you *sure?*"

"I am sure. Just such as you are, you are more to me than any ten-years-ago self of yours could have been. However radiant she was, she could never have rivalled this woman whom I love to-day."

She felt his arms close around her, claiming her. Content which was measureless filled her heart. Looking into his eyes, in the fulness of her peace, she whispered, —

"Thank God, I am happy!"

And a voice like an echo, strange, hollow, unearthly, sighed after her, "*Thank God, I am free!*"

A sound like the rush of wings was in the room, and then silence; and they both felt that the weird of the waiting spirit was over.

RICHING VERSUS PROVIDENCE.

JACOB RICHING sat alone in his solid, old-fashioned house in Washington Square. Fashionable New York had moved up town, but Jacob Riching had no idea of following. He was a stern, hard man, not fond of change. His father before him had lived and died in Washington Square, and there had Jacob Riching passed his long life.

He was not a man given to retrospect; and it was an odd thing in his experience that on this evening of December 31, 1883, memory should have taken his unwilling hand and led him quietly backward all through the long and lonesome years to the old time when he, even he, was a young fellow and sat, on such a night as this, before the fire, with his mother at one corner of the hearthstone and his father on the other, and he between them was dreaming to the tune of their droning talk his own dreams.

They were solid dreams, — solid enough even then. Poetry had never wooed him, or art enthralled him, or even romance touched him with her glamour. He had passed the two years since he left school in his father's business; and his dream was that at some not far dis-

tant day he should be made a partner, and the old sign of "Riching's" should be taken down and a new one of "Riching & Son" put up in its place. People would not be long in learning that the new sign meant new fashions. He would extend the business far and wide, and they would find there was new life in the old concern.

And that next year his business education went forward so rapidly that his father grew into almost a habit of looking up to him; and as it happened that on New Year's Day he would be twenty-one, it was planned that on that day the old sign should come down and the new one go up, and "Riching & Son" should take their place among the business houses of New York on the 1st of January, 1840. Advertisements in the papers had heralded the coming event. James Riching had made a speech to the men he employed, and told them that from the next morning his son's authority would be equal with his own. Yet after all it never came to pass. That very night of December 31, 1839, as if death had a grudge against well-laid human plans, a sudden apoplexy called James Riching out of this perplexing world, and his son reigned in his stead, and the sign was still "Riching's."

Jacob Riching was a wonderfully bright fellow from a business point of view; but all the same he would have been very much at a loss in those days but for the aid of his father's head book-keeper,—a young man, himself, of not more than twenty-eight, but thoroughly familiar with every detail of the business.

People made plans for young Riching, as people always do make plans for their neighbors. Of course, they said, he would take Simes into the business. Simes's knowledge would be a fair offset to his own capital, and it would be a good thing all round. But these wise people did not know Jacob Riching or his commercial ambitions. He raised Tom Simes's salary, and made it quite worth the book-keeper's while to stay on; but he himself was the moving spirit of all, and remained sole master.

In his secret thoughts he resolved that the firm name should never be changed until a son of his own should be ready to come into it. He had much the same kind of pleasure perhaps, in the thought of handing down his name and business from generation to generation, that the head of a ducal house might have in transmitting to the direct heir of his body his title and estate.

For a dozen years after his father's death he did not get time to marry. His mother sat at one corner of the fire, and he sat in his father's place at the other; and everything in the house went on with such monotonous regularity, and one year was so like another, that he hardly realized how they were gliding by him until, after a winter of slow decline, death took away the Widow Riching and brought her son face to face, rather abruptly, with the final goal to which all life tends.

It was not because Jacob Riching was lonely that at thirty-three he married Emily Ford; but with the thought of "Riching & Son" in his mind. He came

home from his mother's funeral realizing that he *was* thirty-three, and that he would do well to look to the prospects of the future firm. Emily Ford was young and sweet and pretty enough to justify any man in marrying her; but Jacob Riching was far too busy and too hard-hearted for any such romance as falling in love. He saw in bonny Emily a girl quite suitable in age, fortune, and character to be his wife, — a very proper person to bring into the world the junior member of the future firm of "Riching & Son."

If pretty Emily had any hidden romance of her own in connection with the marriage, she soon learned how out of place it was, and put it away with her wedding finery; but oddly enough the substantial comfort of Washington Square did not seem to agree with her. She introduced to the light of day and the inspection of her lord and master one or two babes, who barely looked around them long enough to come to a hasty conclusion that they did not like the world on which they had entered, and so departed from it. Jacob was honestly sorry, since these disaffected flyaways, who would not remain with him, were sons, and might in time have fulfilled his hopes, had they chosen to stay here.

It was not until he had been five years married that any child concluded to abide with the household; and this time it was a girl, who, with the patience of her sex, resolved to make the best of life, having once entered upon it. Oddly enough, as she was the first child that decided to live, so she was the last. After

her birth Mrs. Riching's health seemed to fail gradually; and though she stayed fifteen years longer, she became a sort of fireside fixture, and the outside world almost forgot her existence.

The little one was named after her mother, Emily; but the name got shortened into Emmy. It seemed as if all the vitality that the mother had lost had entered into the child. She was an intensified repetition of what Emily Ford had been as a girl,—the same happy, cheery, bright creature, only a little more beautiful, a little gayer, and decidedly more intense in her nature than the mother had ever been. She was the daughter Jacob Riching did not want, instead of the son he so passionately desired, and he troubled himself very little about her. He never got well enough acquainted with her to be fond of her, and he left her up-bringing entirely to her mother. She would not have been the happy creature she was if she had at all realized how that gentle guardian was fading out of life, for her mother was at that stage the one idol of her earnest soul.

One evening Mrs. Riching complained a little of a pain about the heart. Emmy noticed that her lips were white, and kissed them, as she said, to make them red again. The two sat late before a dying fire. Business often kept Jacob Riching occupied until far into the night; and he had fallen into the habit at such times of staying in a room of his own, that his wife's light and easily-broken slumbers might not be disturbed by his coming. Very often mother and daughter sat alone,

as on this evening; but to-night something unspoken seemed to draw them closer together than usual, as they sat hand in hand in the low firelight.

"You are getting almost a woman," the mother said.

"Quite, I think," Emmy answered. "Why, I've heard you say grandma was married at fifteen, and I'm taller than you, little mother, already."

The mother smoothed back the brown, waving hair from the girl's broad brow, and said fondly, —

"That was in old times, dear. Girls are not so foolish nowadays. I hope it will be many a year yet before my girleen goes away to leave me in the cold. Child, you have been the one joy of my life."

"Then you can count on your joy for a long time to come, I think. He'd have to be such a man as I've never seen yet who could coax me away from my mammy."

And then some brands fell, and Emmy picked them up; and the fire sprang into fresh life and glinted on the girl's bright dark eyes and warm cheeks and soft hair; and a sense of her beauty, keen almost to pain, struck home to her mother's heart.

"Ah, but you *will* marry sometime," she said with a long sigh, "and somehow I dread it for you. You need warmth. You could not bear a cold, dead life. What I am going to say will sound romantic, dear child; but there's no one but you to hear me, and I tell you now that of all the good things that belong to this present life, true love is the best. Marry the man

whom you love, and who loves you. Let nothing else tempt you, — nothing prevent you."

It was after events, no doubt, which made these words seem to Emmy so sacred and so binding, for they, and the good-night that followed them, were the last her mother ever spoke.

That night Emily Riching died as quietly and uncomplainingly as she had lived. When the morning sun looked in to find her, she had gone, beyond the night and the stars, to the world that has no need of the sun by day.

Jacob Riching took his wife's death very calmly. From his point of view her life had been a failure; for the firm of "Riching & Son" had been exactly twenty years postponed by his marrying her. It looked a little as if Providence had been opposed to his designs; but Jacob Riching was but fifty-three, then, and rich, and his purpose sprang up afresh from his wife's grave. He waited a decorous year, for he was a proper man, and then he proposed to a young lady who seemed to him, as Emily Ford had done, a quite suitable wife. Unfortunately the young lady's views did not coincide with his own, and her decided refusal took him by surprise. Twice afterward he made similar vain attempts to ally himself properly, and then ceased his efforts in that direction.

Meantime Emmy, left very much to herself, had found her chief comfort in the house of her father's head book-keeper. Mrs. Simes had been one of the few persons whom the late Mrs. Riching had welcomed

into her retirement, and Emmy had known and liked her from a child. With her heart well-nigh broken by her mother's death, she had turned to this old friend for comfort, and had grown to be almost like a daughter in the Simes house before it had even entered in Jacob Riching's head to ask himself what had become of her. And in the Simes house was a son, some six years older than Emmy, already doing very reasonably well in business, and quite capable of knowing his own mind. And this son, Thomas Simes, Jr., had been fully aware that he was in love with Emmy ever since one day when he had found her sitting with his mother, clad in her deep mourning, with her face that seemed to him the saddest thing in the world, and the sweetest. And though the subject had never been hinted at between them, be sure that Emmy knew his heart, and had answered its unuttered question with all her own.

After Jacob Riching had failed in his third and last attempt at wooing, he quietly conceded the point that Fate had baffled him in that especial direction ; but he was as much disinclined to be beaten as ever, and a new plan formed itself in his mind. Emmy should marry. Emmy's husband should add the name of Riching to his own, and thus at last should "Riching & Son" come to be one of the great business names of New York, and might after all be handed down from generation to generation, even as he had at first planned.

Having come to this conclusion, and being a man of

business and a trader to the blunt ends of his strong fingers, he went home to take stock, — that is to say, to look at Emmy with a keen eye to her market value. It would have been hard to find a lovelier young creature of seventeen than this one who awaited him in his warm, brightly-lighted dining-room. Jacob Riching perceived this fact with a pleasant surprise. He was more social than usual; and after dinner he even turned Emmy a compliment on her good looks, and accompanied his request that she should leave off her mourning and choose herself a proper wardrobe to go into society with a check which quite astonished her by its magnitude.

“But I have no *chaperone*, papa,” she said gently. “Mrs. Smith does very well to keep house, and to sit in the room when my music and language masters come; but I could hardly go to parties with her.”

“Certainly not,” Mr. Riching answered with heroic self-denial. “I will go with you. I can afford to put my work aside somewhat, in your interest; and you are not likely to need me always.”

The next year's life to Emmy Riching was something other than she had known. She wore beautiful gowns; she drove in a well-appointed carriage; she went to numberless parties; she entertained at home; and being but mortal like her peers, she would no doubt have been very much spoiled but for the refuge from worldliness which she found at the Simes's quiet fireside, and the strong though still unspoken love that held her heart.

It was a year before any admirer presented himself to Miss Riching who found favor with her father. When at last such an one came, he was an old-young man, canny and prosperous, with a reasonably good fortune and a strong commercial ambition. Had such a son of his own been given to Jacob Riching, then indeed would his cup of content have been full to the brim. The next best thing would be to have him for a son-in-law.

As was befitting so reasonable a suitor, the young man spoke first to the father of his charmer, and was met on the threshold of his wooing by the stipulation that if his suit were successful he should add Riching to his own name, enter into business with his father-in-law and be the "son" of "Riching & Son." Probably nothing could have pleased him better, but he was commercial enough to show a little discreet hesitation. He presently, however, accepted the condition, and Jacob Riching undertook to prepare his daughter to give him a favorable answer.

You have seen that Emmy Riching had begun her life by disappointing her father. She ought in the outset to have been her own brother; and it certainly seemed to be the least she could do to make up for this by giving her father a son-in-law after his own heart. Jacob Riching, then, had reason on his side when, lingering a little after breakfast was over, he laid before Emmy the proposal of Mr. Straiton, and confidently expected her pleased acquiescence.

"*That man!*" came in a sort of gasp from her lips, and her eyes grew suddenly very wide and bright.

Naturally her father, his own mind already made up, misapprehended the purport of her exclamation.

"Yes," he said with an air of self-congratulation, "Robert Straiton. He did hesitate a little at first about adding Riching to his name; but he soon consented, and I offered to speak to you to prepare you for his coming."

"I'm very glad you did. It's much easier. Why, papa, I would not take him if he were a gold mine. I *hate* him."

This vehemence, so unexpected, and really, as we must admit, so objectionable, nearly stunned Mr. Riching. He was silent for a full minute, and then he remarked with a magisterial air which he had found to answer very well in his business, —

"Miss Riching, I am not accustomed to have my propositions met with such violence; and certainly in this affair I consider myself the best judge of what is for your interest. I will leave you to think the matter over, and by dinner-time I shall expect to find you in a better frame of mind." Thereupon he made his exit with dignity.

Poor Emmy! With no mother to comfort her, what should she do but betake herself to motherly Mrs. Simes? And what subtle instinct of the position was it that brought Mr. Thomas Simes, Jr., home to luncheon? I am not telling, you will please to remember, the story of Miss Emmy Riching's heart, but only of her father's struggle to get his own way in spite of Providence; and I should think scorn of deliberately

listening to the vows of true lovers. But anybody who was at all near by might have heard young Simes's last words, —

“You know you are eighteen, Emmy; and no one can force you to marry against your will. You are sure you won't give in?”

And equally well any one might have heard her answer, —

“I! I thought you knew me better than that.”

That evening Jacob Riching was quite prepared to receive his daughter's dutiful submission. She was her bright bonny self at dinner, and he could hardly have been better pleased with her if she had been her own brother. When dinner was over and they were alone, the father said quietly, “I expect Mr. Straiton about nine.”

“You will kindly excuse me from seeing him, papa?”

“By no means. He is coming to see you, and I expect you to make it pleasant for him.”

“I can hardly do that, papa. I shall never marry him.”

“You will go out of my house if you don't,” Riching said hotly. He had forgotten that his daughter had his own blood in her veins, and could be as resolute as himself.

“I was quite prepared for that,” she answered very quietly. “You know I am past eighteen, and free to please myself in marriage, though I would have preferred to please you also. But I must marry the man whom I love.”

“*Love!*”

There was a quite indescribable scorn in Mr. Riching's tone as he uttered that sentimental, objectionable word.

“Yes, papa. The very last charge my mother gave me the night before she died was to marry for love, and for love only.”

It was on the very tip of Jacob Riching's tongue to say, “Your mother was a failure from first to last;” but something, he hardly knew what, restrained him. He only asked with a sneer, —

“Have you then already found this beloved object, that you are so unwilling to give the man of *my* choice an opportunity to speak for himself?”

“Yes, papa. I am engaged to Mr. Thomas Simes, Jr.; and I mean to marry him.”

“Do the parents of Mr. Thomas Simes, Jr., know of this delectable engagement?”

“No; we thought it right to speak first to you.”

“And since when, may I be allowed to ask, have you been engaged?”

“Since to-day at noon.”

“Ah! and the matter is quite settled?”

“Yes, papa; and now that you know I must marry him, you will be kind to us, won't you, if it were only for my mother's sake?”

“I am not a father in a dime novel,” Mr. Riching said grimly. “I wish you no harm. Simply, if you carry out this plan, I am done with you, — *quite done*. Take till to-morrow night to think it over.

I will send a message to postpone Mr. Straiton's visit till then, and meantime you may come to your senses. If I find you here when I come home to-morrow night I shall take it for granted you mean to obey me. Otherwise, perhaps you will make other arrangements."

The next morning Jacob Riching sent for his head book-keeper.

"Simes," he asked, "do you know that my daughter is engaged to your son?"

The utter amazement on Thomas Simes's face made answer even more strongly than his words, —

"Certainly not!"

"So it is. But I am a just man, and since you are evidently not to blame, and the thing has gone on without your knowledge, it shall make no difference in our business relations. The girl may come to her senses and give the whole thing up; but if not, and they marry, I simply wish never to hear either of their names mentioned by you while you remain in my employment. You understand me?"

"Perfectly. You have the habit of being understood and obeyed, Mr. Riching."

When Jacob Riching went home that night the dinner-table was arranged for one only; but upon his plate lay a little note in his daughter's handwriting, — a note which said: —

"I have made up my mind what to do. I am going to Mrs. Simes. You will have due notice of my marriage, but I will trouble you no farther until you send for me."

The interview which came afterward with Mr. Straiton was not pleasant for Jacob Riching. Once more he had been worsted in his struggle to have his own way. He told the whole truth frankly, and the old-young man, with that composure which was his strong point, answered politely, —

“I regret my own disappointment certainly; but as for yours, might not the son-in-law of your daughter’s choice add your name to his own, and come into the firm, as I would have done had I been so fortunate as to please her?”

“I think he will, *when* I invite him,” Jacob Riching answered.

Of course the self-willed young people were married in a few weeks, and no doubt they rejoiced in the days of their youth; but I really am not disposed to trouble myself about them any more than Papa Riching did. Let them go on in their self-willed way. They were company enough for each other. It was only Jacob Riching who was lonesome. It was in 1875 that the mutineers were married, and at that time the great merchant was only fifty-six. There might still have been time, perhaps, to outwit Fate by marriage, but former defeats had discouraged the man, and he went on his silent and solitary way without further striving.

From time to time a question came to him, rather as a suggestion from outside than as a thought originating in his own mind, whether he had done quite right by Tom Simes, the father. He remembered how very necessary Simes had been to the beginning of his suc-

cess, and wondered whether such services were after all fully repaid, even by a good salary; and would it not have been a fairer thing by Simes if he had consented that the children should marry, and taken Simes's son as his partner? But for the most part, Jacob Riching was able to turn a deaf ear to this impertinent whisper from somewhere.

So the years went on. It is just possible that for wilful Emmy and her young husband time galloped withal; but it moved heavily enough for solitary Jacob Riching. He had been thoroughly beaten by Fate. To found the house of "Riching & Son" had been the dream of his boyhood, the ambition of his young manhood, the strong purpose of his middle age; and again and again had stern death met him on the threshold of his desires, and at last love—the foolish young love of a girl and boy—had overthrown him utterly. His business grew and grew; and he pushed it on vigorously, rather from habit than from any real interest. His name would die with him, and he could not carry his fortune through the gates of the grave.

I have just come now to the place where my story began. The time is the 31st of December, 1883, and Jacob Riching, in his sixty-fifth year, feels himself already an old man. It was in the melancholy company of his own thoughts that we have gone back to his boyhood, and then on through the advancing years that have at last left him so old, so solitary, and so sad. It is as if he, who had taken stock of so many things, were now taking stock of his own life. What

indeed, was the sum of these years of struggle? He was restless. He felt as if some change were before him. He thought of his wife, dead so long ago. Could *she* be reaching out pale hands to draw him into the world where she had gone? No, surely; for he realized, in this final stock-taking, that the only thing in her for which he had never bargained was her love.

What, then, was this undefined influence that was making solitude terrible? He must get away from it, somehow. He would go to Simes's. At least he should find some one to speak to there. Why, old Simes, now he thought of it, was seventy-one; and yet how young and cheerful he always seemed! What was the secret? He was still not quite sure he had done just the right thing by Simes. Perhaps he ought to have given him a share in the business; and he would have done so years ago, only he had been so set upon keeping it intact for "Riching & Son." Well, there might be something he could do about it, even yet.

He put on his overcoat and went out into the keen cold of the December night. It was a gay night, as the night before the New Year is wont to be. The life of which the streets were full made his loneliness lonelier. The frosty air made his quiet blood tingle. He felt a sharp sense of his own existence. Actually he too was hurrying with the rest.

After a brisk walk of a quarter of an hour he found himself at his book-keeper's door. Old Simes himself

opened it; and a look of puzzled surprise crossed his face as he saw what visitor had arrived. "Anything wrong, Mr. Riching?" he asked anxiously.

"No, nothing; unless it's wrong that I should be paying you an unexpected visit."

"No, no, bless my soul, no!" the good book-keeper cried, hospitable even in his embarrassment. "Walk upstairs. I hope—I say—I mean, it's a sort of family gathering to-night—kind of a watch-the-old-year-out business, you know."

He bustled on as he spoke. Mr. Riching followed silently up the stairs and into the door of a brightly-lighted, cheerful-looking sitting-room; and the warm glow of fire and lamps fell upon a family gathering, as Mr. Simes had said. Motherly Mrs. Simes, with her soft white hair and her tranquil face, sat at one corner of the fireplace, and against her knees a sturdy little boy of perhaps four years old was leaning. At the table, looking over a book of pictures, was a brown-haired little girl, some two years older, and beside her, telling her the stories of the pictures, was a young man, handsome enough, and if the witness of his face could be trusted, good enough to justify any woman for loving him. And at the other corner of the fireplace sat, as of course you know by this time, Emmy, — brighter, happier, handsomer than ever. What *would* Jacob Riching do?

He walked up to old Mrs. Simes and shook hands with her, and then he crossed over to young Mrs. Simes and put out his hand.

"So *this* is what I came for?" he said. "I see you are not sorry for anything, Emmy?"

"I'm not sorry to see you, papa," Emmy said, smiling. "It was all I needed to make me altogether happy."

Jacob Riching cleared his throat.

"It's New Year's Day, to-morrow," he said.

If that seems an irrelevant remark to the reader, I have no doubt that Jacob Riching knew just what he meant by it.

The very next day he proposed to Thomas Simes, Jr., to add to his own the name of Riching and come into the firm.

"I might have done so in the beginning of things," the young man answered; "but I've lived too long now as Thomas Simes, Jr., to show my father's name, at this late day, the disrespect of changing it."

"It will have to be 'Riching & Co.,' then, after all; for I must have you for my partner. I set out for the firm of 'Riching & Son,' and I've struggled hard enough for it; but when a man fights against Providence he does n't seem to get the best of it."

THE HAUNTED INN.

But soft! methinks I scent the morning air;
Brief let me be.

HAMLET.

[It was my friend, Captain Winship of the army, who told me the story. No braver man ever wore sword or carried musket. I tell the tale in his own words.]

I WAS on leave that summer. I had spent a few weeks of it with my mother and sisters at Saratoga, until I got heartily tired of the whole thing, — the gaud, the glitter, the overdressed women, the waste of human life. They wanted to keep me with them till autumn, but I mutinied. I told Cordelia, who thought it would be “so nice” for brother James to get acquainted with some pretty girl and marry her, that I had rather catch trout than women. I took a box of fishing apparatus delicate and dainty enough to have delighted the heart of good old Izaak Walton, and plunged into the savage wilderness, as the girls called it, — that is, the pleasant romantic regions in the neighborhood of the Catskill Mountains, which the trout have had the good taste to choose for their especial abiding-place.

It was just nightfall when I reached the little inn in the quiet village of Witch-Holm. I do not know for

what it was indebted to its somewhat ominous name, but I conjecture to some old Knickerbocker legend. It was a place after my own heart. I looked about me with serene satisfaction as I drew rein. The church and the few houses which clustered picturesquely about it were on the slope of a hill; and at the right rose the mountains, catching the sunset light, robed in wonderful hues of purple and gold and azure. It was just the place for those still, murmurous, limpid streams which the trout love. I resolved to stay there for a few weeks.

"We're at our journey's end, you and I, Vindictive," I said gayly, as I patted my horse's neck. At that moment mine host appeared on the threshold, with a pipe in his mouth, — a good honest burly man, who would have looked well in one of Tenier's pictures.

"I should be sorry to disappoint you, sir," he said as he came forward, "but for to-night our small house is full. There is a cattle-fair in the neighborhood; and I really have not a bed to offer you."

"But have you no place where you could stow me away just for to-night and give me better quarters afterward? I meant to stay some weeks in the neighborhood."

"I'm really very sorry, sir; but a bargain's a bargain. And every bed in my house is promised except one, and you would n't take that, anyway."

"It's too wretchedly poor, eh?"

"On the contrary, it's the best bed and the best room in the house."

My curiosity was excited, and I begged him to explain his meaning.

"Well, sir, generally speaking, I don't believe much in ghosts and goblins; but the green chamber, that's what we call it, is haunted and no mistake about it. More than one bold traveller has insisted on staying in it when the house was full; but they've always repented their bargain, and I don't want to put anybody else in it, anyway."

"How long has it had this bad name?"

"I never heard of anything being seen there until I bought the inn,—that will be six years ago next New-Year. I don't see any call the ghost had to follow my family; but I must own it appears to have come here with us."

"What is it like?"

"A tall woman in white, so all say who have seen it; but further than that the accounts don't agree. Some say she has green hair like a mermaid. Some tell me her face is that of an old hag; others say she is young and handsome."

"Probably they are too frightened to see straight. By your leave I will stay there to-night and form my own opinion on the subject."

"You had better be advised in time, sir. I think you will repent your bargain."

"Why? Has she ever hurt any one?"

"No; only frightened many an honest man's wits

half out of him. Besides, there is no knowing what she might do. I don't think we've any call to tempt Providence."

"Nevertheless I think I will occupy the green chamber with your permission. Cowardice was never reckoned one of my failings, and I may be able to solve the mystery."

The worthy publican offered no further remonstrance. My portmanteau was carried into the green chamber. I bestowed my personal supervision on the grooming of Vindictive, made a hearty supper off some fine trout whose speckled brethren I meant to be still better acquainted with, and then spent the short summer evening wandering about the little village.

I was tired, and it was not much after nine o'clock when I went to bed. "The Good Samaritan," as its name was set forth upon the sign, was a rambling two-story house, with a piazza on three sides of it. My room was on the first floor, with a low window opening upon the piazza. It was hung with green paper, and the curtains to the bed and the coverings to the furniture were of green chintz. There was a wardrobe tall and large enough to have afforded a convenient hiding-place for a good-sized man, and it was also painted green. My first business was to make a thorough examination of the premises. I could see no chance for trap-doors, sliding panels, or any other contraband mode of ingress or egress. I fastened the door securely, hung my clothes across a chair, and went to bed.

I could not sleep. I was not afraid; and yet every story I had ever heard of supernatural visitations came back to me. All the ghosts whose traditional acquaintance I had ever made walked deliberately through the halls of my memory, from the hero of Cocklane down, or rather up, to the respected paternal relative of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. It was not the train of thought best calculated to resist the inroads of superstitious fear. I tried to cast it off. I made the night musical with "We won't go home till morning, till daylight doth appear," alternating the performance with "Villikins and his Dinah," which was just coming in fashion. Then I resolutely set myself to go to sleep. But the full July moon shining in at my uncurtained window seemed to defy my endeavors, and I fell to counting the flowers on my chintz bed-curtain. The employment must have had a soporific influence, for the next I knew the eight-day clock in the hall was striking twelve, and I was awakened.

I looked toward my window. It was being softly opened. A woman in white stood before it, the window-casing surrounding her like the frame of a picture. As nearly as I could see she was a little above the medium height, very fair, with yellow hair and large blue eyes. She looked so white and strange in the moonlight, I am not above confessing that my heart thrilled with a fear to which I had believed myself superior. She was gazing straight into the room toward the bed; still she seemed to see nothing.

She undid the window-fastening after a moment and walked in. Deliberately she crossed the floor and came toward the bed. Was it strange if I drew myself into the smallest possible compass on the back side against the wall. I did not utter a word; but I think I could have faced a whole army with firmer nerves than that one white figure. She came steadily onward, and when she reached the bed passed her hand over it, and then gently laid herself down. I wonder if I breathed? Every faculty was absorbed in the effort not to attract the attention of this visitor from another world.

How much braver we all are in theory than in practice! I had often wished when I heard stories of unearthly visitations that I could see with my own eyes a ghost. I had been so sure that I should be ready to talk to it; I would learn mysteries of the other world,—shake hands across its confines. This was speculative. Now that the hour and the ghost were actually present, my bravery was of the Jack Falstaff order. What if she should touch me, I thought, as I cowered terror-stricken on the farther side of the bed. But she did not; and after a while I began to feel my powers of reason and self-control come back to me. Whoever the spirit was it had clearly no hostile intentions toward me. I was at liberty to lie still and observe it.

A very lovely woman she looked like, lying there in the moonlight. The long yellow hair, unconfined by band or fillet, floated over the pillow. The blue eyes

were still wide open, and they possessed the true ghostly attribute, — they had no speculation in them. But as I listened I heard a soft regular breath, as of one sleeping calmly. I could see the rise and fall of the white drapery upon the breast of my celestial visitant. I began to ask myself whether breathing was one of the mortal attributes retained by disembodied or re-embodied spirits. I had never heard so. I had made a new discovery, before which Madame Blavatsky might resign her pretensions.

The investigation began to be very interesting. I was no longer afraid. Indeed I stoutly affirmed to myself that I never had been, — that ghost-seeing to a man of my nerve was a mere bagatelle. It is just possible that the continuance of the soft-drawn regular breathing aided me in keeping up my courage. A hand not very small, but shapely and soft, lay stretched out upon the counterpane. As I was looking at it, I saw by the moonlight a ring flash on its third finger. Discovery No. 2. — Ghosts, that is, feminine ghosts, retain their human fondness for ornament. Well to know that! I might carry about with me a gem or two to propitiate them if occasion offered. A thought came to me so bright that I at once repudiated its originality, and concluded myself a medium by impression. I would take off the ring and retain it. It was most likely a family relic, and by means of it I might doubtless ascertain the “what’s her name and where’s her hame” of my nocturnal visitor. Cautiously I possessed myself of the outstretched hand;

it was warm. Discovery No. 3. — Ghosts are not the cold, fishy nondescripts they have so long been represented. Others have written of them from imagination ; I shall speak from actual knowledge. Somehow the hand I held thrilled me as no mortal touch ever had, — not more, however, than one would naturally expect from the clasp of a spirit. I did not feel at liberty to retain it any longer than was necessary to effect my purpose, so I quietly slipped off the ring and let the hand fall back again into its place.

I was not exactly in the humor to sleep, so I adjusted the pillow comfortably under my head and devoted the next two hours to watching the ghost. It was about three o'clock when she rose in the same slow careful manner with which she had at first placed herself, and passed slowly from the room, opening the window and closing it behind her as before. I concluded that the performances were over for the night, adjusted the green drop-curtain of my bed, and slept quietly till seven o'clock the next morning.

When I made my appearance in the bar-room, mine host surveyed me with much such a look as you would bestow on one of the fine fellows who had survived the ride of the six hundred at Balaklava.

"You stayed there all night?" he said with an accent of interrogation.

"Yes."

"Rested well — per — haps?"

"Never better in my life. In fact, I like the room

so well that I will engage it for the next six weeks, or until the trout cease to bite."

He surveyed me with a look which any hero might have considered a compliment. Drawing a long breath he said slowly, —

"Well, you're a cool one, — about the coolest chap I've happened to come across. I shall be glad to accommodate you. There's plenty of other rooms you could have, though."

"Thank you. I believe I shall be best suited in the green chamber."

.
I made no discoveries concerning my ghostly friend that day. I did not allude to the subject of my visitation, but it had been clearly no dream, for I had the ring — an emerald in an old-fashioned setting — safely in my waistcoat pocket. I thought about the matter, I presume, quite as much as was necessary, — trout-fishing being a contemplative occupation.

That night I used the precaution to fasten my window securely by means of a couple of strong nails. Then I took a favorite volume from my portmanteau and read till nearly midnight, that I might run no chance of falling asleep. At the same hour as before, being quietly in bed, I saw by the moonlight the white woman standing before my window, with her floating yellow hair and wide-open blue eyes. She worked away at the sash for a few moments, sorely puzzled, apparently, by its not yielding to her attempts to open it. At length the disappointment seemed to wake her,

— you will have discovered by this time, as I had, that she was a somnambulist, — she looked into the window with a puzzled and troubled gaze, as if she were utterly at a loss to understand how she came there, glanced at the bed, as if she were aware that the room had an occupant, and was fearful of having been observed. Then, on seeing that all was still and apparently as it should be, she walked away with a relieved expression. This broke the spell. I never heard of any future apparitions.

The next day, having farther ingratiated myself into the good graces of my worthy host, I was introduced by him to his wife, — a delicate gentle-woman, not at all like our conventional ideas of a buxom landlady. I was moreover invited to find my way to the family sitting-room, where the daughters of the host would do their best to help me pass away the time. Should I have been Cordelia Winship's brother if I had not doubted the capability of these damsels to interest *me*, James Winship, U. S. A.? However, I was not enough of a hermit to refuse to test the family resources for entertainment. It was too sultry to fish, I did not care for reading, and I accepted the landlord's hospitality.

The door of the sitting-room stood wide open as I approached it; and though I saw no one, I heard a voice so sweet and low, so refined and lady-like in its modulations, that even Miss Winship would have found in it nothing to criticise.

“Is n't it too bad, Mary, I can't find my emerald

ring? I have been looking for it everywhere. I have n't seen it since the day before yesterday."

I was about to behold my celestial visitor, — to unravel the mystery of the ghost. With a gravity commensurate to the occasion I walked in. Mrs. Herrick was sitting at the table.

"My daughters Mary and Alice, Captain Winship," she remarked.

A momentary glance assured me that there was nothing in the Miss Herricks to condescend to or patronize. Innkeeper's daughters though they were, denizens moreover of a quiet country village, the most casual observation revealed that they possessed a refinement of taste and cultivation of mind fully equal to the women one meets in society. Their attire—I have a trick of judging women by their dress—was unexceptionably simple, suitable, and lady-like. Even had I not heard her lamenting the loss of her ring, I could not have failed to recognize in Alice Herrick the ghost of the green chamber. The yellow hair which I had seen floating over the pillow—it was of just the shade the early Tuscan painters loved—was braided now, and wound about her small well-set head. Her blue eyes were such as always attract me, — clear, innocent, and full of thought. In short, I was in love with her at first sight; and if she had faults I had lost the ability to criticise them. Not that I had the faintest idea of seeking my "affinity" at Witch-Holm. I only meant to cultivate Miss Herrick's acquaintance sufficiently to enliven the period of my stay with a

pleasant friendship, and finally, to restore her the emerald ring, and restore myself, heart and fancy free, to my mother and sisters.

But—man proposes and the Fates dispose; marriages, like ghosts, are fabricated in the celestial regions; Love goes where it is sent—behold adages without end by which I could prove that there was nothing surprising in the fact that before three weeks had passed I began to think it would be the most reasonable and desirable event which could happen for me to make fair Alice Herrick mistress of my worldly possessions, as she already was of my heart. Of course I was troubled by no doubts of her consent to this course. Men never are. Whatever he may profess in love-making, every man believes every woman quite ready to fall like a ripe peach into his hand, for the asking, and a refusal is always fully as overwhelming in the wonder it occasions as in the despair.

Alice had been for five weeks my frequent companion in my wanderings along the streams where speckled trout disported in unconscious innocence, quite unaware that her presence was their salvation. I had resolved to ask her to marry me; how to phrase it was the only question. I had had no experience. I had a vague idea that I was to practise a kind of guerilla warfare, and surprise her in some unguarded moment into a confession of her love. I was musical; witness the solo of "Villikins and his Dinah" heretofore alluded to. I had some thought of adopting for my declaration the words of some popular song with

variations, as for instance, to the tune of "Annie Laurie," —

"And for bonny Alice Herrick,
I would lay me doun and dee."

I ended by telling her in a few words, as heart-felt as they were simple, that I loved her. I was not disappointed, though my insolence in feeling sure of her justly ought to have been punished by a refusal. I was as dear to her as she had become to me, and she promised to be my wife. You know what they used to call me in the mess-room, — "lucky and plucky" — well, it does n't become a man to praise himself. When it was all settled, and the hand I had at first taken so timidly at midnight had been pledged me to have and to hold at pleasure, I said soberly, —

"And now, Alice dear, I want to give you an engagement ring. I think it will fit your finger. You see I felt so sure of you that I had it all ready."

Her eyes kindled.

"I should be angry," she said, more hastily than I had fancied she could speak, — you see we don't know women till we've tried them, — "I should be angry if I did not believe that you respected me too much to mean what you say. Felt *sure* of me?"

I could see in her eyes that she wished for that one spiteful moment that she had rejected me, but I answered gravely, —

"Yes, Alice dear, I have it all ready."

And I drew from my pocket the emerald ring.

"That! Why, I lost it before I ever saw you. How did you, how could you have come by it?"

You may be sure I had my revenge for her momentary insubordination when I told her. She was glad enough to creep to my side and console herself with the reflection that it was her promised husband who had discovered the mystery of the Ghost of the Green Chamber.

"Because, you know, James, if it had been any one else it would be so embarrassing."

"Very, dear."

.

I hurried Miss Herrick in her bridal preparations, and when I left Witch-Holm Mrs. Winship was my companion. In September we reported ourselves to my mother and sisters, then at Newport.

"You perceive that I caught the trout," I said in a low tone to Cordelia, after I had presented to that young lady my wife.

"Did you, — or did the trout catch you?"

HIS UNCLE'S MEMORY.

IT was a strange story, though a simple one; but then most of the stories of real life are strange. Margaret Ingalls **had loved** her husband; that was the one thing in the whole world of which she was sure. When she read stories and poems about love, as she did read them often,—for she was a young creature, even in her widowhood,—she always felt a little sympathetic thrill at her heart, and said to herself, —

“That is how *I* loved John.”

Yet the fact that she had loved John at all was a puzzle to the Ryefield people, who speculated about the matter, as country neighbors will. When they were married, John Ingalls, as everybody called him, was already forty years old, and Margaret was only seventeen. Her father had left her to “the trusty guardianship of his good friend, Jonathan Ingalls,” as he said in his will.

Ingalls settled the estate, looked into the girl's affairs a little, as in duty bound, and then rather suddenly asked her to marry him. She had grown up admiring John Ingalls. He was tall, handsome, full

of strength and power, — just the man for a romantic girl to make a hero of; and Margaret Fay was romantic to her very finger-tips. Moreover, she had been brought up by her father since her mother's death, when she was too young to remember; and naturally she shared all his likes and dislikes, and the strongest feeling he had in the world, next to his love for his daughter, was his attachment to his lifelong friend, Jonathan Ingalls.

Ingalls had certainly not wooed his bride in any story-book fashion; but then she had felt that she could not expect that, — he was so much older and wiser and better than she in every way. He had talked to her very gently about her loneliness, and then he had said that *he* was lonely too; and if such a thing were possible as that she could make up her mind to come home with him and be his child-wife, and live with him always, he would be very, very good to her. And then he added, with something that would have been shyness had he not been such a self-possessed man, —

“You know, Margaret, that I am only two years younger than your father.”

“As if that mattered!” she cried with her brown eyes shining, and her cheeks glowing softly, — “as if that mattered! You are *you*!”

“That means that you will come to me!” he said; and then he took the two little fluttering hands she held out to him into his own, and gave her a kiss so like the ones which her father used to give her at night

and morning that it brought the quick tears of memory into her gentle eyes. And so Margaret believed that she was in love, and that this tall handsome man, who had been her admiration ever since she could remember, was her heart's lord, her knight, her hero, and a dozen other high-sounding titles she had taken out of the story-books. Her lover had said nothing to her about money, and she did not know whether she had much or little, — she supposed a good deal, however, since in her father's time they had always lived freely, and none of her wishes had ever been denied her.

They were married on a heavenly morning of early June; and it was the deep midsummer when they came home from their wedding journey, and the man of forty led his girlish bride from the gate to the front door, up the long walk over which the pine-trees met. It was just at twilight; and I think there is no hour so full of mystic solemnity as a midsummer twilight in the country. Pretty Margaret felt the strange spell of it as she stepped into the shadow of the pines. Her very heart stood still. It seemed to her that her Destiny had taken ghostly shape and stood in front of her; and involuntarily she moved to one side that she might not brush the phantom with her garments.

"This is home, little wife," said the kind, cheery voice of her husband; and the spell was broken. She went on then cheerfully enough into the stately old house, where one Jonathan Ingalls after another had lived and ruled ever since the Puritans had first settled Ryefield.

They lived there for one peaceful year, — a very happy year to Margaret, though so quiet. She went on dreaming her own dreams, investing her rather silent, yet always tender lord with all the qualities of the heroes of her books, and honestly believing herself to be the very happiest little wife the sun shone on. She half wondered sometimes that her happiness was so quiet; there were always tumults of one sort and another in the story-books, but that must be because the course of her true love had run so smoothly, and John had none of the faults of temper which the other heroes had.

It was midsummer again when the horse John had ridden away came home riderless; and John was brought afterward by some neighbors who had found him lying placidly upon the grass with no sign of injury about him, but a smile upon his face so full of light and joy that at first they thought he must be alive, and then were frightened, as if such a smile on the face of the dead were unseemly.

The doctor came, — the old village doctor, whose patients were to him almost like his children; and then it came out that both he and John Ingalls himself had known for some years that just this end was sure to come.

The family lawyer came too, — but that was after the funeral, — and made Margaret understand that she was a rich young widow, since all her husband's estates were hers unreservedly; and then she found out for the first time that her father had left no

fortune at all behind him,—absolutely not enough money to pay his debts.

“What should I have done?” thought the poor little widow, “but for John?” She was scarcely more than eighteen then; and she shivered as if she had felt a cold blast when she asked herself the question,—for she had never known a want or a care in her life, and the thought of struggling with the world for her daily bread came to her with a sort of horror. If anything could have made her hero’s memory more dear, it was the knowledge that his love had saved her forever from such a fate.

Her grief for him was not at all passionate, but it was very deep. She felt an intolerable aching want of him in her heart; or was it really the want, not so much of *him*, as of the love and tenderness to which he had accustomed her? Sometimes she felt like a little child whom its mother had left in a great desert. The child would stretch out imploring arms for its mother to come back; but those arms would welcome any kindly comer who would take it out of the awful loneliness. If a thought like that ever crossed Margaret’s mind, she rejected it with hot indignation at herself. She always would mourn for John, always, always,—John who had married her when she was utterly poor, utterly alone, and had made her life henceforth like that of a sheltered flower in a perpetual summer. She would be John’s and John’s only till she died; and then heaven would be heaven, partly because she would so certainly find John there waiting for her.

One day, when John had been dead six months, she beguiled the dreariness of a winter afternoon by looking over an old desk that had been his. She found some things that surprised her,—one drawer in which was such a book as she did not know John cared about, an actual novel; and there were passages marked in this book sometimes heavily, sometimes lightly, as if two people had read it together. And there was a deep, vivid red rose of long ago, which crumbled when she touched it; and its ghost seemed to come out and fill the room with a passionate, despairing fragrance. She wondered a little over this rose and this book, which had a drawer all to themselves; but she did not think much about them, because in another drawer she found a letter, and this too had a drawer quite to itself. On the outside of it was written, —

“For my child-wife to read the day she is twenty-one, if before that time I am dead, as I think will be the case.”

Margaret took up the letter; and a strange thrill shook her, and she grew a little cold. It was as if John had reached out of his grave and touched her. She was so very lonely that she longed to read this message from him, and she questioned awhile with herself whether she might not do so. But she had an almost superstitious dread of disobeying him in anything; and she shut the drawer hurriedly lest she should be tempted, and went away and sat down in the firelight. She began to think how very young she was, — only eighteen and a half now, and it would be

two years and a half more before she could even read that letter, — oh, how many, many weary years, if she lived as long as most people do, before she could go to John! She *must* read his words after all; but no, ten thousand times no! she would do his will now that he was gone even more sacredly than if he were alive.

She got up and went back to the desk. She took one look at the drawer where lay the crumbled red-rose petals with their dying, despairing scent; and then she looked at the letter, — the very last words John could speak to her until she too was dead. Then resolutely she locked the desk as one who would hold no further parley with temptation, and bringing the key away with her, threw it into the very heart of the burning coal-fire.

When John had been dead two years one of his nephews came home from the medical studies he had been completing in French and German hospitals. It was John's money that had sent him abroad, but Margaret did not know that until afterward; and John had arranged for him, when his foreign studies should be completed, to come home to Ryefield and begin his medical career as partner of the old doctor who had killed and cured so many generations of the Ryefield people that it seemed almost time he should enter into his rest. The young fellow was another Jonathan Ingalls, though every one called him Jack; and it had been the uncle's dream that this younger John Ingalls should live after him in the old place, and keep up the old name there. That dream came to its

end, however, when he himself married Margaret; and he left her all his possessions, as I have said, and left her absolutely unfettered as to their future disposition.

Naturally, when the young doctor came to Ryefield, he went to see his uncle's widow. She was twenty years old then, and a daintier, sweeter little lady had never been mistress of the stately old house in all the generations of Ingallses who had lived and died there. Dr. Jack found it impossible to regard her as his uncle's widow, though she still wore her unmitigated widow's mourning. He looked into her soft brown eyes, and watched the blush-roses come and go in her fair young face, and he fell, at once and altogether, in love at first sight. He hardly realized just what his own symptoms meant; but he presently "diagnosed" the case, as he said, and he knew it was a mortal wound which his heart had received.

He tried to be very discreet, and not to shock his "rare, pale Margaret" by any too hasty demonstrations, but he actually haunted her in spite of himself; and she rather liked it, and began to think it was very nice to be an aunt by marriage to somebody.

He thought that in waiting from midsummer until the middle of winter before he asked her to marry him he had shown himself a model of discretion. He was not prepared for the look of shocked surprise that dilated those soft eyes of hers, when suddenly, one winter evening, he told her that he loved her, and asked her to be his wife. She just looked into his face with that sudden amazement in her own, and

said with an air she tried to make very dignified indeed, —

“It seems to me you forget yourself strangely. *I* have some regard for your uncle’s memory if you have none. I shall be Mrs. Jonathan Ingalls until I die.”

“That is just what I have been hoping,” cried wicked Jack; and suddenly his meaning and the quiet humor of his cool answer touched that chord in her that quivers between smiles and tears in all women, and she burst into a laugh that made her, a moment after, hate herself and him.

“I am not laughing because I am pleased,” she cried hotly, almost beginning to weep.

“No, I understand,” said imperturbable Jack, “you are laughing because you are *displeased*.”

“Yes, I *am* displeased and shocked and grieved; and I thought you were a real friend and a relative, and now I know —”

“That I love you,” put in Jack, “as *I know* nobody ever did before, and I don’t believe any one ever will again; and I want you for my wife, to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, until death us part.”

“We will not wait for death to part us,” she said with a quiet strength that astonished Jack more than any of her charms had ever done; and she rose and walked steadily out of the room, her long black robes trailing behind her.

Jack stood still for a while in front of the fire. I believe he whistled. Perhaps he thought she would come back again, but if so he reckoned without his

hostess. She waited quietly in her own room until she had heard the front door shut. Then she knelt down and leaned her head against John's desk. She longed desperately to open it and read her letter. She thought that to read that letter would be like having John take her into his arms, and thank and bless her for being true to him when she had been tempted, — yes, she owned to herself that she *had* been tempted just a little. But she had thrown away the key; and after all, there were only six months to wait, and she must do John's will.

The next morning she sent Dr. Jack a very dignified little letter. It said: —

DEAR JACK, — You will please not to come here again until you are ready to forget what you said last night, and to respect your uncle's memory as you should.

Your well-wishing aunt,

MARGARET INGALLS.

His well-wishing aunt! This time Jack whistled; there was no mistake about it. He put the little letter in his pocket as if it had been a love-token, and went off to make a round of medical visits, not half so melancholy as any woman would think he ought to have been under the circumstances.

Really it was very lonesome for Mistress Margaret the rest of that winter. But she never had more than a moment's temptation to recall Dr. Jack. "If he *could* treat her like that," she used to say to herself, "why, let him go!"

And somehow the winter wore away, and the long,

tedious New-England spring — which is seldom spring at all — went by; and then summer burst upon the world, all bloom and pomp and radiance. And with the June came Margaret's twenty-first birthday. She remembered, when its morning dawned, the strange feeling she had had when Jonathan Ingalls led her home under the pines, and Destiny seemed to stand in front of her, in the very path, and bar her way. Again, this morning, she felt as if Destiny and she were face to face.

She dressed swiftly, and then she sent for a locksmith; and in five minutes more John's letter was in her hand.

She barred the door of her room. She sat down and broke the seal, and then she put her hand over her eyes and said a silent little prayer before she began to read. This was the letter: —

MY LITTLE MARGARET, — Other husbands have reached from out the very grave to draw yet closer the chain by which they held a beloved woman in bondage; I reach out of mine to set my child-wife wholly free. You have never loved me, my Margaret, with your uttermost love; and perhaps you yourself will have found that out before this letter reaches you. Nor have I ever loved you as those lovers love of whom your girl's heart has dreamed. I *did* love once, with all the passionate young heart of me; and she whom I loved died.

I never meant to marry any one else; but when your father, my best friend, left you to my care, I knew no other way to care for you so well as to bring you home, my wife. I should not have dared to take this responsibility; but I knew well, as Dr. Leland could tell you, that my life must

needs be brief, — a matter of months perhaps, of two or three years at the very most; and so I ventured to take you and care for you tenderly, knowing that before your girl's heart was ready for the deep love of womanhood I should have set you free.

When you read this, you will be twenty-one, — young, beautiful, prosperous, with all the world before you where to choose. You have a nature unusually capable of happiness, and I predict for you very great happiness some day. When that day comes, be sure, my little Margaret, that if the happy dead can know the joys and sorrows of those they leave behind them here, *we* shall look down from our far place and bless you, — she and I.

JOHN INGALLS.

Do you think Margaret's first thought a strange one? It broke from her lips in a happy little cry, "Thank Heaven, he never really, *really* loved me!" I suppose *she* knew why she thanked Heaven for *that*.

That afternoon she had dressed herself in a soft, simple white gown that made her look more lovely and more girlish than ever. Her eyes were bright with some new, dear brightness, and the fitful blush-roses came and went in her cheeks more fitfully than ever. It was no wonder that the maid who answered her summons when she rang the bell looked at her in surprise when she said, —

"I wish you would fetch the doctor. I don't mean the old doctor; bring Dr. Jack. Say I don't feel very well."

"What is it, dear aunt?" said Jack, half an hour later, pretending to look at her anxiously. "Is it your head?"

“No, Jack, I think it’s my heart. It’s — it’s this letter.” And she put his uncle’s letter into his hand.

And Jack read it, and then he smiled ; and then — for Jack was always over bold — he bent his tall head and kissed her.

“Yes,” he said, “I see how it is. And you shall be Mrs. Jonathan Ingalls until you die.”

WOE UNTO THE PITCHER.

When the pitcher falls upon the stone, woe unto the pitcher; when the stone falls upon the pitcher, woe unto the pitcher; whatever befalls, woe unto the pitcher! — TALMUD.

GABRIELLE LA PIERRE was a stone, — about that all her admirers agreed. Some said she was flint; some granite; some a diamond; some an opal with heart of flame under hoar-frost; and a few called her a pearl, but these last were not learned in gems.

Louis la Cruche was a pitcher which had been filled at many fountains. He had read of the gush of pure, sweet waters from the rock of Horeb, under the rod of the prophet, and he thought himself prophet enough to smite from this other stone a sweet draught wherewith to quench his thirst.

All the successes on which he had prided himself were worthless while Gabrielle la Pierre remained unwon. Not that he cared or expected to care for her very seriously. He was not a marrying man; nor yet was he a monster, a dark, tragic wretch such as Byron loved. He was only a very harmless stage villain,

amusing himself and others with his little play, and when it was over putting out the lights and sleeping the sleep of the just. He was accustomed to be admired and flattered and dreaded by women; but Miss la Pierre did none of these things. Her cheeks were flower o' the peach, and he had never been able to deepen their glow. Her brown eyes met his fearlessly. She always answered his sentimental speeches with a jest, — in short, for once he was an empty pitcher, which the bright wave of success seemed never likely to fill.

This state of things, added to the megrims of the season, brought on a sort of spring fever, — a restless ennui, which made him half ill and wholly discontented. He never lowered his flag willingly; but this whole past winter he had wrought at his task without moving Miss la Pierre to an extra heart-throb. Had he found her easy to win, he would have found her easy to lose; but to lose before winning was unsatisfactory to Louis la Cruche. He grew interested in this story, of which he flattered himself he was the hero, and determined that its last chapter should be fashioned to his pleasure.

Miss la Pierre went to Watch Hill to spend the summer. She really loved the sea, and she loved quiet. So she established herself at the Lighthouse, where the great waves broke almost beneath her windows, and their hoarse murmur sighed through all her dreams. Only eight boarders could be accommodated there, at the most; and she had made sure that the

six already established would be unobtrusive and inoffensive before she beguiled her long-suffering Aunt Jane into their vicinage.

Once there her spirits rose with the tide. She was out all day upon the beach, careless of the lovely peach-blossom bloom framed in by the bright gold of her hair. Any one else would have grown sunburned and ugly ; but she was untouched, or at least unharmed, by sun and wind, — perhaps because she was a stone. She used to carry a book out with her in the morning, but she never turned its leaves except as an excuse for silence, if occasionally some idler intruded upon her solitude. What the sea said to her every day and all the day, no one else knew ; but it seemed a story which she loved to hear, for the brown eyes and peach-bloom cheeks, which the golden hair framed, grew brighter day by day.

The third evening she sat quite by herself, as usual, looking out across the waves to the crimson and flame of the sunset sky. She heard a coming step, which was not the feminine footfall to which her ears were most accustomed. She turned round with a petulant shrug of her shoulders, and Louis la Cruche was making his bow before her.

“ *You* here?” she asked with scant courtesy ; but a brilliant smile followed her words and softened them.

“ Not quite *here*,” he said, laughing at her astonished face. “ Not at the Light. You took care to go where there was no room for me ; but I shall be at Plimpton’s for a few weeks to come. Did you think

me any such passive individual as to let all the savor be taken out of my life and make no struggle? Besides, I thought my health needed Watch Hill."

"You came here because I was here?"

She spoke the words as a question; but he received them as an affirmation.

"I admire your penetration. Yes, I came here because you were here. You interest me more than anything else at present."

"And if you interested me in a ~~similar~~ degree, how long would your interest last?"

"You know me, I sometimes fancy, better than I know myself. You shall answer your own question."

Miss la Pierre smiled a slow smile which betrayed nothing. She sat silently for a few moments. She had meant in coming to the Lighthouse to elude for the time the world, the flesh, and the devil. She was going to be simple here as a child, she thought, alone with this grand nature. And now temptation had followed her. To be a fisher of men was the sin that most easily beset her. If this fish *would* come here and put himself in her way, how could she help trying to catch him? Afterward, — but old Izaak Walton himself was not over-anxious about the fate of his prey after he had caught them. She did not apprehend much danger for him either. She believed in Louis la Cruche only a trifle more than he believed in himself. He thought himself incapable of a genuine heart-ache; she fancied that he could love a little, but not enough to hurt him, as she said grimly to her-

self. To the wind then with her moral heroics! for the fish that would fain be caught she would not spare hook and line.

Do not think I am mixing my metaphors unconsciously. Louis la Cruche was a pitcher everywhere, and always a pitcher; but just now and here he seemed to suffer a sea change, and presented himself to Miss la Pierre under the similitude of a fish, and the temptation to see him swinging at the end of her pole was irresistible.

I am at a loss now how to tell you my story, — there are so many things that can never be written. One was not apt to remember what Miss la Pierre said, any more than what she wore. Are masked batteries the least fatal? La Cruche could never have told what made his days restless, his sleep uncertain, or what it was that she left untold each night which made him feel that he must go back next day to hear the rest. I think myself that her spell was a great deal more in what she did not do than in anything she did. There was something elusive about her, like an unfulfilled promise. She said so much to-day that you thought she would say more to-morrow; but when to-morrow came you found the last chapter forgotten, and had to begin the book again at the title-page.

After six weeks Louis la Cruche did not feel sure that he knew her any more intimately than at the beginning; she had read him all through, he knew; for, beguiled by the interest with which she listened,

he had shown her the whole scope and compass of his life, and felt at the last some honest shame at its worthlessness. It must seem so small a thing in her eyes, he thought.

She, however, had never talked to him of anything more personal to herself than the books she liked. He could have told you that Browning was her favorite poet, and that she was fond of Thackeray's novels. He knew that she loved roses and hated heliotrope; but he did not know what he slowly began to think he would give ten years of his life to discover, whether any man had ever been so much to her as a lay-figure whereon she deigned to hang the glittering drapery of her fancy. The story which the sea had told her over and over during those first blessed, lonely days at Watch Hill, and which it told her even now many a time while she seemed to be listening graciously to his words, he never guessed. But he learned a little of her notions about men and morals, her theories of life; and perhaps the commencement of his truest homage to her was when he began to feel how poor a creature he himself had been.

"You should have lived in the days of the heroes," he said to her one day with a half-veiled laugh.

"I do," she answered quietly. "It does not need that a man wear armor to be a knight."

He thought a few moments in silence of what they had been saying, picking up pebbles and throwing them out to sea with an absent air.

"Did you happen to know Grant Adriance?" he

asked after a while. "He went away just about the time I saw you first."

"Yes, I have seen him," she answered slowly.

La Cruche was looking out over the water, and did not see the sudden warmth on the peach-blossom cheeks, the instant flash from the brown eyes. The fair face was non-committal as usual when he turned round to speak to her again.

"I suppose you would have called him in some sort a hero. He did one thing of which you may have never heard, if you did not know him much. Everybody called it awfully Quixotic at the time, but I begin to think it was a very good thing to have done, after all. You see he might have been a tolerably rich fellow if he would. He had an uncle for whom he was named, and who left him a hundred thousand dollars when he died. The old curmudgeon had also three nieces, but *they* hadn't been named after him, and with their father he had not been on good terms; so though they were poor schoolmistresses, working hard for their daily bread, old Adriance never left them a dollar. But when the fortune came into the nephew's hands, he chose to consider that their rights were as good as his own; so he gave the three girls twenty-five thousand apiece, and kept only the other twenty-five for himself. It was a brave thing to do, now you think of it. It made a wonderful difference to the three girls, none of them very strong; but it left Grant Adriance very far from a rich man."

"And gave him a claim on his own respect and the

respect of others, which money would not go far toward buying," Miss la Pierre said with warmth in her tone.

La Cruche sighed.

"If every man's mother were like you, Miss la Pierre, what a different thing we should make of life! Mine died before I was old enough to know much about her. Perhaps if she had lived I should not have waited till I was thirty before finding out that there were better objects for a man to set before him than his own pleasure."

Something like tears in Miss la Pierre's voice startled him, and he looked round to see her bright eyes dim with them.

"I am not worthy to have taught you or any man such a lesson," she said pitifully. "If you knew how far away from my theories my practice has been, you would understand how your tribute pains me."

That night Gabrielle la Pierre found her pillow one of thorns. Sleep forsook her, following her lost peace of mind. Conscience sat alone, stern watcher at her bedside; and she found that the settlement of her account with herself could not be evaded.

She was ready enough to put on sackcloth, and cover her head with the ashes of humiliation. It was not the worst of it that she began to see that she had made Louis la Cruche love her, luring him on to this, though by no unwomanly wiles; the pity of it was that in loving her he had been loving something better than she was. Her theories had been nobler than her-

self, and they had awakened him to the knowledge of higher ideals. Now, when he understood that she had been trifling with him, would not his new-born faith in goodness turn again to scepticism? Might she not be answerable for the ruin of a human soul?

She went over all her words and ways since she had known him, — as conscience grimly held them up before her, — one by one. She *had* tried to please him; she *had* meant that he should care for her, — knowing all the while that to her he could never be more than the waves that broke with their story at her feet. True, she had only meant to teach him that he was not irresistible; she had never thought of anything in him deeper than his vanity to be wounded. She had regarded him but as an empty pitcher, with whom it was a summer's sport to trifle; what should she do if he asserted himself before her as a man?

There was so little she could do, at best. She could not give him her confidence, for which he had never asked; tell him her story, which he had never expressed a wish to hear; nor, even, having allowed him so long to haunt her footsteps, could she send him away, if indeed she could have made him go, from Watch Hill. What was there to do now but to fold her idle hands?

“It is our fate, let the black flower blossom as it may!” she said, flinging defiance at conscience out of the “Scarlet Letter.” And then she turned over and went to sleep.

She was not so good a woman as Louis la Cruche

thought her. He had begun by fancying her a mere brilliant, now he was exalting her into the Koh-i-noor. What matter, since for him she always had been and always would be a stone?

From that day he began to see a difference in her, however. If there had been a pretty coquetry in her manner before, it was gone now. He found himself separated from her by some fine, imperceptible barrier. If she had shone on him from the first with this cold, far-off lustre, she might have done him good and not evil. But it was too late now; her work had been too thoroughly wrought for those deft fingers of hers to unravel it. If the stone fall upon the pitcher, woe unto the pitcher! but if the stone never stir, and the pitcher fall upon the stone, equally woe unto the pitcher! And Louis la Cruche found out, day by day and more and more, how empty a pitcher he was, the more deeply he despaired of the sweet draught for which he longed.

At what odds with themselves our lives seem! The one thing which could round them into perfection just touches them perhaps. One thrill of electricity awakens us in time to catch a glimpse of the vanishing vision. And then it comes to us no more forever; and we must struggle on alone toward the infinite good if there be anything in us worth saving. But is it forever? If we are worthy of the laurel, shall we not be crowned? Some day, somewhere, for those who have struggled and conquered, *that* waits which shall fulfil every longing. For those who give up and drop

out of the ranks, is there anywhere the mercy which shall turn defeat into victory? God knows.

One August morning Miss la Pierre went down to the East beach alone. The tide was going out, and the wet pebbles it had left on the sand behind it glittered like gems in the sunshine. She thought there had never been so jubilant a day. The story the waves told her when she first came there had been one of prophecy. Now, she fancied, they were chanting a triumphal anthem of fulfilment. They had brought home one ship whose freight was her heart. She held a telegram in her hand, whose contents the glad waves and the glad sunshine surely knew. They were all rejoicing together.

When Louis la Cruche came to find her he, only, seemed in discord with her mood. There was a look of sad and stern resolve on his face. He could be merciless to-day to himself at least. He would dare failure where he had almost ceased to hope for success. She perceived that the time for trifling had gone by. Light persiflage, graceful evasion, would answer no longer. The man before her, she understood, was in earnest, and his earnestness frightened her. She watched a sea-gull flying low, and waited for him to begin.

"When do you go away?" was the question which came first.

"Very soon, — to-morrow or next day, possibly. Only think, we have been here two months."

"You have been here long enough to make for me

new heavens and a new earth," he answered passionately. "I came here for your sake, because you interested and attracted me more than any one else just then; and I thought to pass a summer holiday in flirting with you, — just to play a little game of hearts which would leave neither of us the worse. Instead, you have taught me to love you. I did not think before that it was in me to love any woman. You may scorn me, if you will, for the motive with which I came; and I shall receive your contempt as my just punishment. But I love you as well and as truly as a better man could. Do you despise me, Miss la Pierre?"

"If I did," she said softly, "I must despise myself still more. I too meant in the first place to trifle with you, and to make you care for me seriously if I could. And *I* was infinitely more to blame than you, for I did love some one else. I have been engaged for more than a year to Grant Adriance. He came home yesterday, and to-day he will be here."

"And — forgive me this once — do you love him?"

A deep glow warmed the peach-blossom cheeks to crimson; but the brown eyes met his proudly and steadily, so that he could not mistake their meaning.

"Yes," she said joyfully, "I love him."

Louis la Cruche looked at the bright, sweet face, — bright and sweet for another, not him. He had known many successes in his life, but he was manlier now in this disappointment than he had ever been in any triumph.

"He is entirely worthy of you," he said with grave dignity; "and I know of no other man who is. And yet I would have striven honestly to climb to any height where you beckoned. I would have toiled for you as long as Jacob did for Rachel; and I think I shall be a better and not a worse man all my life for having loved you."

She put out her hand, and he took it silently and held it in a long close grasp. Just then some keen delight thrilled her nerves. She heard a step upon the pebbles which no other ear would have been subtle enough to catch. She looked over her shoulder and saw in the distance, coming toward her, Grant Adriance. She drew her hand from Louis la Cruche's, and went away from him to meet the man whose presence was victory.

"My opal still, with heart of flame under hoarfrost," the new-comer said, looking into her shy, glad eyes as he led her away.

So you see even the one whom she loved best called her a precious stone.

As for Louis la Cruche, let us trust that he will one day be filled at some other fountain; have I not said that he was always and everywhere a pitcher?

DR. HUGER'S INTENTION.

DR. HUGER was thirty years old when he deliberately resolved to be in love, — I cannot say “fall in love” of anything so matter-of-fact and well considered. He made up his mind that marriage was a good thing; that he was old enough to marry; finally, that he *would* marry. Then he decided with equal deliberation on the qualifications necessary in the lady, and began to look about him to find her. She must be a blonde. Above all things else, he must have her gentle and trustful; and he believed that gentleness and trustfulness inhered in the blue-eyed, fair-haired type of womanhood. She must be appreciative, but not strong-minded; well-bred, with a certain ladylike perfectness which could not be criticised, and yet which would always save her from being conspicuous. Not for the world would he have any new-fangled woman's-rights notions about her.

You might fancy it would be a somewhat difficult matter for him to find precisely the realization of this ideal; but here Fate befriended him, — Fate, who seemed to have taken Dr. Huger under her especial charge, and had been very kind to him all his life.

He looked out of his window, after he had come to the resolution heretofore recorded, and saw Amy Minturn tripping across the village green.

Amy was eighteen, — blonde, blue-eyed, innocent, well-bred, unassuming, without ambition and without originality. She was really charming in her own quiet tea-rose style. Her position was satisfactory; for her father, Judge Minturn, was a man of mark in Windham, and one of Dr. Huger's warmest friends. So having decided that here was an embodiment of all his "must-haves," the doctor went over that evening to call at the Minturn mansion. Not that the call in itself was an unusual occurrence. He went there often; but hitherto his conversation had been principally directed to the judge, and to-night there was a noticeable change.

Amy was looking her loveliest in her diaphanous muslin robes, with blue ribbons at her throat and in her soft light hair. Dr. Huger wondered that he had never before noticed the pearly tints of her complexion, the deep lustrous blue of her eyes, the dainty, flower-like grace of her words and ways. He talked to her, and watched the changing color in her cheeks and her quickly responsive smiles until he began to think the falling in love to which he had so deliberately addressed himself would be the easiest and pleasantest thing in the world. She had the prettiest little air of propriety, — half prudish and half coquettish. She received his attentions with a shy grace that was irresistibly tempting.

He went often to Judge Minturn's after that, — not too often, for he did not wish to startle his pretty Amy by attentions too sudden or too overpowering; and indeed there was nothing in the gentle attraction by which she drew him to hurry him into any insane forgetfulness of his customary moderation. But he liked and approved her more and more. He made up his mind to give her a little longer time in which to become familiar with him, and then to ask her to be his wife.

When he had reached this determination, he was sent for, one August day, to see a new patient, — a certain Miss Colchester. He was thinking about Amy as he went along, — laughing at the foolish old notion concerning the course of true love; for what could run any smoother, he asked himself, than his had? It seemed to him as simple and pretty as an idyl, — the “*Miller's Daughter*” New-Englandized.

“Oh, that I were beside her now!
Oh, will she answer if I call?
Oh, would she give me vow for vow, —
Sweet Amy, — if I told her all?”

he hummed half unconsciously as he walked on.

Soon he came in sight of Rock Cottage, the place to which he was going, and began thereupon to speculate about Miss Colchester. Of course she was one of the summer boarders of whom Rock Cottage was full. He wondered whether she were young or old, whether he should like her, whether she would be a profitable patient; and by this time he had rung the bell and

was inquiring for her of the tidy girl who answered his summons.

He was shown into a little parlor on the first floor, and pausing a moment at the door, he looked at his new patient. A very beautiful woman, he said to himself, but just such an one as he did not like. She sat in a low chair, her back to the window and her face turned toward him. She wore a simple white cambric wrapper. Her beauty had no external adornment whatever. It shone upon him startlingly and unexpectedly, as if you should open a closet where you were prepared to find an old family portrait of some stiff Puritan grandmother, and be confronted instead by one of Murillo's Spanish women, passionate and splendid. For Miss Colchester was not unlike those Murillo-painted beauties. She had a clear dark skin, through which the changeful color glowed as if her cheeks were transparent; dark, heavily-falling hair; low brow; great passionate, slumbrous eyes; proud, straight features. There was nothing like a New England woman about her. That was Dr. Huger's first thought; and she read it either through some subtle clairvoyant power or — a simpler solution — because she knew that every one who saw her under these cool skies of the temperate zone would naturally think that thought first. Her full ripe lips parted in a singular smile as she said, —

“You are thinking that I am not of the North. You are right. I was born in New Orleans. I am a Creole of the Creoles. I don't like the people here.

I sent for you because you were German, at least by descent."

"How did you know it?"

It was an abrupt question for a man of the doctor's habitual grave courtesy; but she seemed to him unique, and it was impossible to maintain his old equipoise in her presence. She had read his thought like a witch. Was there something uncanny about her?

"How did I know you were German?" She smiled. "Because your name suggested the idea, and then I saw you in the street, and your features indorsed the hint your name had given me."

"I am glad that anything should have made you think of me."

It was one of the conventional platitudes of which self-complacent men, like Dr. Huger, keep a stock on hand for the ladies they meet. Miss Colchester saw its poverty, and smiled at it as she answered him, —

"I think of every one with whom I come in contact; and I thought of you especially, because I intended from the first, if there were a good physician here, to consult him."

The doctor looked into her radiant face.

"Is it possible that you are ill?"

He had sat down beside her by this time and taken her hand. It gave him a curious sensation as it lay quietly in his. He felt as if there were more life, more magnetism in it than in any hand he had ever touched.

"That *you* must tell me," she said quietly. "My

heart feels strangely sometimes ; it beats too rapidly, I think, and sometimes very irregularly. I have lived too fast, suffered and enjoyed too keenly. The poor machine is worn out perhaps. I look to you to inform me whether I am in danger."

"I must have my stethoscope. I will go for it. Are you sure you can bear the truth?"

She smiled a cool smile touched with scorn.

"I have not found life so sweet," she said, "that its loss will trouble me. I only want to know how long I am likely to have in which to do certain things. If you can tell me, I shall be satisfied."

As Dr. Huger went home he met Amy. Something in the sight of her fresh blond beauty, with its fulness of life and health, jarred on his mood. He bowed to her with a preoccupied air, and hurried on. When he went back to Rock Cottage Miss Colchester was sitting just as he had left her. To sit long at a time in one motionless attitude was a peculiarity of hers. Her manner had always a singular composure, though her nature was impetuous.

He placed over her heart the instrument he had brought, then listened a long time to its beating. He dreaded to tell her the story it revealed to him, and at last made up his mind to evade the responsibility. When he had come to this conclusion, he raised his head.

"I do not feel willing," he said, "to pronounce an opinion. Let me send for a medical man who is older, who has had more experience."

She raised her dark eyes and looked full in his face.

"You are afraid to tell me, after all I said? Will you not believe that I do not care to live? I shall send for no other physician. I look for the truth from your lips. You find my heart greatly enlarged?"

"I told you I did not like to trust my own judgment; but that is my opinion."

"And if you are right I shall be likely to live,—how long?"

"Possibly for years. Probably for a few months. There is no help,—I mean no cure. If you suffer much pain, that can be eased perhaps."

Miss Colchester was silent a few moments. Dr. Huger could see no change in her face, though he watched her closely. The color neither left her cheeks nor deepened in them. He did not see so much as an eyelash quiver. At last she spoke,—

"You have been truly kind, and I thank you. I believe I am glad of your tidings. I think I shall stay here in Windham till the last. I would like one autumn among these grand old woods and hills. I have nothing to call me away. I can do all which I have to do by letter, and my most faithful friend on earth is my quadroon maid, who is here with me. She will be my nurse if I need nursing. And you will be my physician, will you not?"

"I will when I can help you. At other times, may I not be your friend, and as such come to see you as often as I can?"

"Just as often,—the oftener the better," she an-

swered with that smile which thrilled him so strangely every time he met it. "I shall always be glad to see you. Your visits will be a real charity; for except Lisette, I am quite solitary."

He understood from her manner that it was time to go, and took his leave.

That night he walked over to Judge Minturn's. Amy was just as pretty as ever, — just as graceful and gentle and faultless in dress and bearing. Why was it that he could not interest himself in her as heretofore? Had the salt lost its savor? His judgment indorsed her, as it always had. She was precisely the kind of woman to make a man happy. That pure blond beauty, with its tints of pearl and pink, was just what he wanted, always had wanted. Why was it that he was haunted all the time by eyes so different from those calm blue orbs of Amy's? He thought it was because his new patient's case had interested him so much from a medical point of view. He was tired, and he made that an excuse for shortening his call.

He went home to sit and smoke and speculate again about Miss Colchester. He seemed to see her wonderful, exotic face through the blue smoke-wreaths. Her words and ways came back to him. He had discovered so soon that *she* was no gentle, yielding creature. She had power enough to make her conspicuous anywhere, — piquant moods and manners of her own, which a man would find it hard to tame. He was glad, — or thought he was, — that such office had not fallen to his share; that the woman he had resolved to marry was

so unlike her ; yet he could not banish the imperious face which haunted his fancy.

The next day found him again at Rock Cottage ; but he waited until afternoon, when all his other visits had been made. It was a warm day ; and Miss Colchester was again in white, but in full fleecy robes, whose effect was very different from the simple cambric wrapper she had worn the day before. Ornaments of barbaric gold were in her ears, at her throat, and manacled her wrists. A single scarlet lily drooped low in her hair. She looked full of life,—strong, passionate, magnetic life. Was it possible that he had judged her case aright? Could death come to spoil this wonderful beauty in its prime?

Their talk was not like that of physician and patient. It touched on many themes, and she illuminated each one with the quick brilliancy of her thought. He grew acquainted with her mind in the two hours he spent with her ; but her history—who she was, whence she came, why she was at Windham—remained as mysterious as before. Her maid came in once or twice, and called her “Miss Pauline,” and this one item of her first name was all that he knew about her more than he had discovered yesterday. He saw her,—a woman utterly different from the gentle, communicative, impressible, blue-eyed ideal he had always cherished ; a woman with whom, had she been in her full health, his reason would have pronounced it madness to fall in love. How much more would it be madness now, when he knew that she was going

straight to her doom, — that when the summer came again it would shine upon her grave! And yet it seemed as if the very hopelessness of any passion for her made her power over him more fatal.

He went to see her day after day. He did not consciously neglect Amy Minturn, because he did not think about her at all. She was no more to him in those days than last year's roses, which had smelled so sweet to him in their prime. He was absorbed in Pauline Colchester, — lived in her life. She accepted his devotion simply because she did not understand it. If she had been in health, she would have known that this man loved her; but the knowledge of her coming fate must make all that impossible, she thought. So she accepted his friendship with a feeling of entire security, and though she revealed to him no facts of her material life, admitted him to such close intimacy with her heart and soul as under other circumstances he might never have reached in a lifetime of acquaintance.

And the nearer he drew to her the more insanely he loved her, — loved her, though he knew the fate which waited for her, the heart-break he was preparing for himself.

At last he told her. He had meant to keep his secret until she died, but in spite of himself it came to his lips.

In September it was, — one of those glorious autumn days when the year seems at flood-tide, full of a ripe glory, which thrills an imaginative temperament as

does no tender verdure of spring, no bravery of summer. Pauline Colchester, sensitive to all such influences as few are, was electrified by it. Dr. Huger had never seen her so radiant, so full of vitality. It seemed to him impossible that she should die. If he had her for his own, — if he could make her happy, — could he not guard her from every shock or excitement, and keep her in such a charmed atmosphere of peace that the worn-out heart might last for many a year?

It was the idlest of lover's dreams, the emptiest and most baseless of hopes, which he would have called any other man insane for cherishing. But he grasped at it eagerly, and before he knew what he was doing, he had breathed out his longing at the feet of Miss Colchester.

"Is it possible," she said, after a silent space, "that you could have loved me so well; that you would have absorbed into your own the poor remnant of my life, and cherished it to the end? I ought to be sorry for your sake; but how can I, when just such a love is what I have starved for all my life? I have no right to it now. I am Mrs., not Miss Colchester. I was Pauline Angereau before Ralph Colchester found me and married me. I had money, and, I suppose, beauty; perhaps he coveted them both. He made me believe that he loved me with all his heart; and then, when I was once his wife, he began torturing me to death with his neglect and his cruelty. He was a bad man; and I don't believe there is a woman on earth strong enough to have saved him from himself. I

bore everything for two years in silence. Then I found that it was killing me, and in one of his frequent absences, I came away to die in peace. When it is all over, Lisette will write to him. He will have the fortune he longed for, without the encumbrance of which he tired so soon. You must not see me any more. Bound as I am, feeling what you feel, there would be sin in our meeting. And yet I shall die easier for knowing that once in my life I have been loved for myself alone."

Then Dr. Huger rose to go. To-morrow perhaps he could combat those scruples of hers; but to-day there was no more to be said to this woman whom another man owned. To-morrow he could tell better how nearly he could return to the quiet ways of friendship, — whether it would be possible for him to tend her, brother-like, to the last, as he had meant to do before he loved her. He took her hand for a moment, and said, in a tone which he tried so hard to make quiet that it almost sounded cold, —

"I must go now. I dare not stay and talk to you. I will come again to-morrow."

"Yes, to-morrow."

Her face kindled, as she spoke, with a strange light as of prophecy. What "to-morrow" meant to her he did not know. He turned away suddenly, for his heart was sore; and as he went he heard her say, speaking very low and tenderly, —

"God bless you, Francis Huger!"

The next day he went again to Rock Cottage. He

had fought his battle and conquered. He thought now that he could stay by her to the end, and speak no word, look no look, which should wrong her honor or his own. He asked for her at the door as usual; and they told him she had paid her bill that morning and left. She had come, they said, no one knew from whence; and no one knew where she had gone. She had left no messages and given no address.

Dr. Huger understood that this was something she had meant to keep secret from him of all others. Was he never to see her again? When she had said, "Yes, to-morrow," could she have meant the long to-morrow, when the night of death should be over? He turned away, making no sign of disappointment, — his sorrow dumb in his heart; and as he went, her voice seemed again to follow him, —

"God bless you, Francis Huger!"

For two months afterward he went the round of his daily duties in a strange, absent, divided fashion. He neither forgot nor omitted anything; yet he saw as one who saw not, and heard with a hearing which conveyed to his inward sense no impression. *She* was with him everywhere. All the time he was living over the brief four weeks of their acquaintance, in which, it seemed to him, he had suffered and enjoyed more than in all the rest of his lifetime. Every day, every hour, he expected some message from her. He felt a sort of conviction that she would not die until he had seen her again. He thought at last that his summons to her side had come. He opened, one day, a letter directed

in a hand with which he was not familiar. He read in it only these words : —

Madame Pauline Angereau Colchester is dead. I obey her wish in sending you these tidings.

LISETTE.

From the letter had dropped, as he unfolded it, a long silky tress of dark hair. He picked it up, and it seemed to cling caressingly to his fingers. It was all he could ever have in this world of Pauline Colchester. Her "to-morrow" had come. His would come too, by and by. What then? God alone knew whether his soul would ever find hers when both should be immortal.

Will he go back again some day to Amy Minturn? Who can tell? Men have done such things. It will depend on how weary the solitary way shall seem, — how much he may long for his own fireside. At any rate, he will never tell her the story of Pauline.

DID HE FORGET HER?

"Whom first we love, you know, we seldom wed.
Time rules us all."

I.

ELEANOR REVERE.

A VERY pretty sight was wasted on the loungers about the little country railway station at Hampshire, while Nell Revere stood on the platform leaning on her father's arm, and waiting for the train to come up. She had great soft brown eyes and lovely yellow hair and a smile that made the day brighter. She had delicate features and a slight, tall shape that would round into splendid womanhood by and by; for Nell was only eighteen now, — a young Artemis, not yet touched by love, not yet guessing at any of the passionate joys and woes of life. The fresh October air deepened the pink of her cheeks, and the splendor of the day was reflected in her eyes. Her father looked tenderly down at her as he answered her merry chit-chat. To him this daughter of his was just his one interest in life.

Quincy Revere was proud of his old and stainless name, of the generations of cultured men and women at his back, and of various other things besides; but he

was proud of them chiefly for the sake of his daughter Eleanor. He valued them all for what they would be worth to her, and for what they had made of her. He had loved her mother; and when he lost her in the early years of their marriage he felt that the world and its ambitions were over for him, except as he should renew them vicariously in his child. So he moved with the little one into a retired country town where he had lived ever since in a style of quiet refinement suited to his well-bred tastes and not large fortune. With the assistance of a certain Miss Titus, middle-aged and sombre, who combined the functions of housekeeper and governess, he had educated his girl, and made of her, at eighteen, a creature in whom his heart and his eyes delighted.

And now he was about to send her out into the world alone, to learn for herself its lessons. He had a distant cousin and old friend, Job Carlyle by name, who was the husband of a very fashionable and attractive woman, a recognized leader in society. These Carlyles, living fifty miles from Hampshire, had never seen Nell since her childhood, — Mrs. Carlyle, indeed, who had been scarcely ten years a wife, had never seen her at all. But mindful not so much of their distant relationship as of their early friendship, and of some obligations long ago incurred toward Mr. Revere, it had entered Mr. Carlyle's mind to invite the young lady to spend the winter with them, and take her first lessons in society under the distinguished guidance of his own wife. Mrs. Carlyle had favored the plan, —

as, indeed, she made it a point to favor most plans of her husband's, — and had written, at his instance, a cordial and earnest invitation which, after a good deal of discussion in Hampshire, had been accepted.

Miss Revere was to make by herself the short journey, which involved no change of cars. Her father had wished at first to accompany her, but she had overruled him. He had not looked well of late, and she was determined to spare him the fatigue of travel. He could put her on the train, she told him, and the Carlyles would meet her at the end of the route. She was going where she would need to learn a little independence; and for a beginning she fancied she could be trusted to sit alone for two hours in a railway car. Papa could n't always keep her in his pocket.

It is doubtful, however, whether her eloquence would have succeeded in inducing Mr. Revere to let her go out of his sight until he had himself delivered her into the safekeeping of Job Carlyle, but for certain sharp twinges of pain which threatened the return of inflammatory rheumatism,—an old enemy with whom he had now and then done fierce battle already, and with whom he chose to fight it out in his own camp, rather than run any risk of turning invalid on the hands of the Carlyles. So he bore his tortures in brave silence, determined that Nell should not guess at them and stay at home to nurse him. He and Miss Titus could carry on the campaign together; and it was time Nell, poor dear, saw a little of the world beyond Hampshire.

At last they heard a shrill, approaching whistle, and Mr. Revere put his hand under his daughter's chin, and turned her face up to his. Let him look at her well, for he will never see quite the same care-free girl again. The great soft brown eyes will have learned a deeper meaning when he meets them next; the bright, fitting smile will come to the curving lips more rarely. She will have crossed the point

"Where the brook and river meet, —
Womanhood and childhood fleet."

"God bless you, Nell!" it was the father's voice which said it, trembling a little; but may we not say it too, and add out of the pathetic wisdom which time has taught us our benediction on all young souls?

The train came tearing up, puffing, wheezing, and then stopping. Men and women and babies hurried on board, and among them Eleanor, cool, graceful, well-appointed, with Hope smiling at her lips, and Regret making her eyes misty, — poor, pretty Nell!

She had a novel in her hand to read, of course; but she turned only a few pages. I don't think it was the book's fault, however, for it was "Who Breaks Pays," and if a naturally constituted girl is in a state of mind not to care for Lill Tufton, she would not care for any one in fiction. But no romance, after all, is so profoundly interesting to us as our own; and Nell felt that she was just going to begin to live hers. What would it be? Who its hero? What the *mise en scène*? What the *dénouement*? Her future stood close beside her, veiled in shadow. She could not see

its prophetic eyes ; but her heart thrilled with expectation, her pulses beat fast with the quick life of youth. For she looked for happiness, of course. She had faith in herself and in the world ; and why not ? She would have lessons to learn, which she would cry out against learning ; but the hours and the days would go on, teaching her in spite of herself, and leaving her at last, let us hope, old and gray and wise, with a wisdom worth its price.

“ Cottage Farm ! ”

The conductor called the name with a certain drawl, significant, you would imagine, of despairing wonder how any one could think of living in the place so mentioned. It was the station nearest to Longwood, and hearing it called, Nell knew that she had received the cue by which she was summoned to appear on the stage of life. So she stepped out on the platform, a tall, slight girl in brown, and stood there, a little flushing and anxious, until an elderly man, leaning rather heavily on a gold-headed cane, came toward her.

“ I am sure this must be Miss Revere,” the stranger said. “ You have your mother’s eyes and hair ; but I remember her better than you do.”

Nell put out her hand cordially. Those words about her mother made Mr. Carlyle seem near to her at once.

“ I know her so well through her pictures, and through papa’s descriptions, that it almost seems as if I had lived with her all my life,” she answered.

Mr. Carlyle's coachman was waiting, and the little business of getting trunks and giving up checks had to be gone through with; and then Eleanor found herself beside Mr. Carlyle in his carriage bowling over the smooth Longwood road. So this elderly gentleman was the husband of the fashionable Mrs. Carlyle, the fame of whose elegant gayeties some wind had blown even so far as Hampshire!

He did not look at all gay himself. There seemed to her a certain cadence of weariness or disappointment in his voice, and yet he was most kindly and courteous. He made on her the impression of a tired old man, who would like, above all things, quiet and rest, but who still desperately held his own in the stress of life because of something or other which was expected of him. She knew him better afterward, and cared for him much; but she never wholly lost this impression of him as a man who was living up to some other person's ideal.

Their drive was short, but in the course of it he went back again to the subject of Eleanor's mother.

"How men differ!" he said thoughtfully. "I knew how the blow struck home to your father when your mother died; and I thought he was just the man who could not have borne to talk of her."

"Indeed he could not, to any one but me," Nell said simply, drawn on by something genuine and true which she felt in her companion to speak to him so freely; "but to me it was different. He made it a duty to tell me all about her, for he could not bear

that she should lose her child's love by going out of the world ; and he has made her so real to me that she seems like the good angel of my life. I think I shall be sure to know her when I see her in heaven."

"You'll find her there,—not a doubt of it," the tired-seeming old man said dreamily. "She was an innocent, unworldly soul ;" and then he closed his lips and sat with a shadow on his face which made Nell long to comfort him, as she had so often comforted her father.

The carriage turned presently into an avenue which led through pleasant grounds up to a stately gray-stone house, in front of which it stopped.

Mr. Carlyle stepped out slowly, and assisted his young guest, then gave her his arm and led her up the steps, welcoming her anew with an old-fashioned courtesy which she liked, as from that hour she liked most things about Job Carlyle. He took her through a long hall, and into the loveliest room she had ever seen,—Mrs. Carlyle's morning-room, as she knew afterward,—and so she came into the midst of her drama of life. This great gray-stone house at Longwood was the stage, and here, before her, were the players.

II.

ARRIA CARLYLE.

WHATEVER the weather might be out of doors, you always stepped into summer when you went into Mrs. Carlyle's morning-room. It was hung with leaf-green

silk, and a light pervaded it such as sifts through the trees in a summer wood. A great bay-window was full of flowering plants and shrubs. The carpet suggested woodland moss. The softest, most luxurious seats invited you. Books were scattered on the tables. Good pictures hung on the walls. Bronzes, carvings, cameos, were here and there, — not one ill-chosen, not one too many.

Arria Carlyle herself looked as if she belonged to the sun and the summer. She had a Greek profile, a proudly set head, a figure luxuriously moulded. Her eyes were large and black, and soft as velvet. Her heavy, drooping hair was black also. Her lips were full and bright, her complexion clear and dark. These are all words, and fail to move you. Arria Carlyle was a woman, and she never failed. She had the temperament which goes with such a physique as hers, — slow, lazy, careless of trifles, not easily disturbed, and therefore acquiescent about small matters, but capable, when roused, of an intensity of love or hate or scorn, which perhaps you and I would have meekly thanked Heaven that we could not comprehend.

Withal, she meant to be a good woman. Let me tell you that at the outset, that you may not misjudge her.

My story is not of Lamia or Circe and their victims, but of ordinary, well-intentioned, refined, and moral American men and women. Their worst sins will be in yielding to the subtle temptations which assail the soul, and leave the life conventionally blameless. Mrs.

Carlyle did not intend to yield even to these. She honestly meant to do her duty in thought and word as well as act. She is to be pitied, it may be, rather than condemned, if her temperament was against her. She said her prayers faithfully; she discharged many of her obligations perfectly; for the rest, who is sufficiently without sin to cast the first stone at her?

She was talking busily, when her husband led his young guest into the room, with a man quite as handsome as herself in a very different style; but she lifted her long lashes, and saw the graceful, well-bred girl, with her lovely eyes and her sunny hair, and felt honestly glad to welcome so much youth and brightness, and thankful that after all Mr. Carlyle's whim was turning out so well, and that she was not to be bored the winter through by a *gauche*, unattractive visitor hanging heavily on her hands.

She rose "with that regal, indolent air she had," and came forward cordially in response to her husband's words of introduction. She took Nell's hand in hers, and touched the girl's cool cheek with her brilliant lips. With that kiss began Nell's thralldom, — the curious worship a young girl so often pours out on a woman a dozen years older than herself.

This introduction over, Mr. Carlyle said with just the slightest shade of constraint in his manner, "How are you to-day, Sargent?" and the man who had been sitting with Mrs. Carlyle came forward and was introduced to Nell.

He was tall and strongly built, with the square,

grand shoulders over which girls rave in the young days when they ask only for a man who is handsome and gallant. Nell looked up at him shyly as he bent over her hand, and the suggestive blue eyes, whose every expression she learned afterward to know so well, shone down, she thought, into her very soul.

"It is almost lunch-time; shall I take you upstairs?" Mrs. Carlyle asked, and then led the way from the room. Eleanor followed, entranced by the beauty of her hostess, charmed by the grace and graciousness of her manners, and feeling for the first time in her life a little awkward, a good deal insignificant, the least little bit homesick, and vaguely depressed and discouraged generally.

Her spirits came back with a fresh toilet and her luncheon; and she began to speculate, as girls will, about these people among whom she had been thrown.

Who was this tall handsome man whom Mrs. Carlyle sometimes called Howard, but who could not be a near relative, since he so scrupulously called her Mrs. Carlyle? Why was he there so familiarly? Mrs. Carlyle looked twenty-five, and was, as Nell happened to know, thirty, while her husband must be in his sixties! What a strange marriage! Did they love each other, these two? And what could it mean, that longing, hungry look with which Job Carlyle's eyes rested on his wife, as if there was something in her gift which he would peril his soul to win? Who was who, and what was what? Involuntarily Nell sighed, and wished for one moment that she were back in

Hampshire, where at least she knew all about every one ; but that was only for one moment. What woman, since Eve, has not longed, at whatever cost, to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil?

In the drawing-room, where they all went after lunch, was a picture curiously like, and as curiously unlike Mrs. Carlyle. Nell sat and looked at it until Mr. Carlyle remarked that he had to drive into town before dinner, and his wife followed him into the hall to say good-by, which was one of her ways of doing her duty.

Then Nell said to Mr. Sargent, "Surely that must be a portrait of Mrs. Carlyle; and yet there is an unlikeness which puzzles me."

Sargent smiled. "The unlikeness is between Mrs. Carlyle's present and her past self. The picture was painted a dozen years ago, when she was Arria Huntington. She was just eighteen then,—less handsome possibly than now, but very winning."

"And you knew her?"

"Oh, yes. Arria is my cousin. I have known her all her life."

Just then Mr. Carlyle's carriage-wheels rolled down the avenue, and his wife came back into the room looking a little bored, a little tired, but — Howard Sargent had been right about that — more beautiful than the picture. And yet in that record of earlier days there was something which had faded out of her face now. Was it hope or faith or love?

"If you would take Miss Revere about the grounds,

Howard," Mrs. Carlyle said languidly; "it would perhaps be an entertainment to her. At any rate, it would give you some exercise, and be a graceful tribute to those laws of health which I always find myself so much the better for persistently disregarding."

Sargent started willingly enough. Nell's fresh, pretty face was a pleasant companion. He liked to talk to her, and see the fitting smile come to the curving lips and light up the sweet eyes. The golden glory of her lovely hair was not lost upon him, nor yet the elastic grace of her step, nor the dainty simplicity of her toilet. He had not lived thirty-five years in the world, hard worker as he had been during many of them, without learning to see beauty wherever it could be found, and enjoy it in a certain lazy, grand-seignior manner of his own. There were better things in this man than had ever yet come to the surface. One great blow, long ago, had made him doubt everything that he could not see; but there was enough which he could see about Nell Revere to keep him from fancying it a penance to spend an October afternoon in her company.

When they went in at last, Mrs. Carlyle was ready for dinner, and in the drawing-room.

"You will be late," she said to Nell, "unless you can dress quickly; but I have sent my maid to your room to help you." And so with a word of thanks Nell tripped upstairs. While she sat still for Laurette to brush out her yellow hair, she was thinking how pleasant the afternoon had been, and then feeling

half vexed at herself for enjoying it so much when she knew how her father must be missing her at home.

Meantime, in the dusky drawing-room, Howard Sargent was standing near the grate-fire by Mrs. Carlyle, and saying carelessly, —

“I must not come out here so often ; I am growing idle.”

“You do not need to work now for your bread,” she said softly, a lingering, regretful emphasis on the “now.”

There was a curious property in Mrs. Carlyle’s voice, — a certain quiver of emotion, subtle and indescribable, which thrilled you and made you feel that there was more in her words than met your ear. Perhaps it was one of her greatest charms that she talked little, and when you heard those sweet, subtle tones once, you longed to hear them again and waited for them. She piqued your interest like an unfulfilled promise.

Sargent was used to her tones, yet they thrilled some chord in him, all the same. He answered quietly, —

“No, I have not now to work for my bread, as you say ; but I ought to work for something other and better than bread. I have no one to be especially proud of my successes, to be sure ; but I do not find myself above caring for them for their own sake.”

“I am proud of them,” she said very softly.

"Are you? You have changed. You had not faith in my power to conquer fate and fortune once, you know. Life has changed since then."

A flame in the grate shot up for a moment and brightened the room, and Sargent saw in its glow that wonderfully beautiful appealing face of hers; but they were both silent for a time. At last he said carelessly, and apropos of nothing that had gone before, —

"Arria, I foresee anxious cares for you this winter. This girl you are to bring out is handsome enough to make a sensation. You will have your hands full with her and her lovers."

"She is very pretty," Mrs. Carlyle answered frankly. She was quite too fine and genuine a woman to under-rate another woman's loveliness; and she was ready to give Eleanor full credit for hers.

Just then a light footfall crossed the hall, and Eleanor herself came in, all in sheeny white. And then Mrs. Carlyle rang for lights, Mr. Carlyle came home and hurried upstairs, and presently dinner was served; and after that Sargent went away.

III.

FLOWER O' THE PEACH.

"You must not think we are going to bore you to death," Mrs. Carlyle said, when she had sat a couple of after-dinner hours in the drawing-room with her guest and her husband "making talk," — a business

well-nigh as dreary as the old Israelites found it to fabricate their strawless bricks. "Almost always people are out here or we go somewhere, — there are operas and plays and parties, something going on, usually; but I thought I would keep you in the shade till I could bring you out properly. To this end I have called the elect together for Friday night. I sent my cards as soon as I knew when you were coming. If you want a dress for the occasion, I think we can manage it, as there will be all day to-morrow, and till evening of the next day."

"Perhaps one of my new ones will answer. Papa imported a dressmaker some weeks ago; and I find myself emerging from my chrysalis years quite a brilliant butterfly. But you will know best, if you'll be so kind as to look my things over in the morning, and tell me whether any of them will do."

"Let me look to-night, if you please. We can see then what lies before us to be done; and an evening dress is always best seen by gaslight."

Nell rose with alacrity; and Mr. Carlyle got up with his air of old-fashioned politeness, and his sense of something which was expected of him, and stood until the two ladies had passed from the room.

"I have five or six party dresses," Nell said, tumbling the contents of a Saratoga trunk recklessly out. "Enough, papa thought, to begin with; and I am to get me whatever you think I ought to have besides. I am to be as gay as you please this winter."

"I hope you'll be happy, at least," Mrs. Carlyle

answered cordially and sincerely, but with that quiver of emotion in her voice which was so apt when she spoke to betray some secret longing.

Oh, how young and fresh this girl was! she thought. What would not she, the wife of rich old Job Carlyle, give to be able really and simply to care about a party or a dress? When any one was thirty, was nothing worth while any more?

Meantime, Nell was unfolding dresses. There were tarlatans, beflounced and bepuffed; a lovely azure silk, of the light silvery shade so beautiful at night; a sea-green, to go with which some mermaid had lent her pearls; and one other, of a rich yet delicate peach-blossom color, which shimmered in the light.

"Why, they are lovely!" Mrs. Carlyle said, almost surprised into enthusiasm. "Your father was a conjurer, and your dressmaker a witch."

Eleanor laughed.

"She came out of a cave on Fifth Avenue, and she took papa the rounds of the dry-goods shops, carrying with her, like a lover, a lock of my hair and a photograph. Which gown am I to wear?"

Mrs. Carlyle considered a moment, then took up the waist of the peach-blossom silk, and held it beside Nell's spirited face.

"I incline to this," she answered, after a breath of consideration. "We can afford to give dressmakers a cold shoulder for the present, so we shall have to-morrow to get acquainted."

Nell sat down under the gaslight when at last she

was left alone, and began wondering, like the old woman in the nursery rhyme, "if I be I," as she took down her wealth of yellow hair and twisted it slowly round her fingers. Her new fineries, which Laurette had come in and put carefully away, did not seem at all to belong to her, used as she had been through all her past life to nothing more sumptuous than a merino or a muslin. But she was not a Miss Revere for nothing. She felt herself, in her heart, quite equal to her clothes, and was neither elated nor put down by them. Still, this life which lay before her seemed very new and strange. Parties, operas, concerts, dramas for her whose orchestra had been hitherto the sough of the winds through the pines, whose sweet singers had been thrush and oriole, and whose society one tender man and one grave, self-contained woman; besides these coming gayeties, moreover, and to be lived among them, her own inner life, which promised a wilder excitement and a deeper interest than anything else could offer. What wonder that she could not sleep at once, and that when her eyes did close her speculative brain led her on through marvels beside which the stories of the Princess Scheherezade seemed tame.

The next day there was a long drive, a nap, a novel, and a little talk with Mrs. Carlyle, and just a little touch of pining now and then for the father, from under whose wing she had never before flown.

Friday was the gala day; and in watching the arrangements which busy florists and upholsterers and caterers were making, there was excitement enough,

and Nell was glad of an hour's rest after dinner, before Laurette came to dress her. She thought she should be the first person in the drawing-room when at length she went downstairs, but Howard Sargent got up from a sofa and came to meet her.

"How early you are!" she said, putting out a little white-gloved hand.

"Yes; I came before the rest on purpose to see you, and enjoy in advance the sensation you will be sure to create. I confess to an almost feminine curiosity as to what you would wear."

Miss Revere stood patiently under the chandelier while he looked at her, but she felt an embarrassed flush stealing up to her cheeks. The flush only made her lovelier, however, as she stood there, tall and slight, her white shoulders and rounded arms gleaming through the misty lace which softened and harmonized her toilet, her brown eyes half merry, half appealing, her wonderful hair crowning her like a tiara on the brow of some young princess, — a creature very fair to look upon in her girlish, unconscious loveliness.

"I'm taking a liberty, I know," he said, "in looking you over like this, getting my private view in advance of time; but we got so well acquainted the other day, when Mrs. Carlyle threw me on your hands to entertain, that I'm sure you'll forgive me for treating you as I would a young sister of my own about whose *début* I was anxious. Now that I've seen you I'm satisfied about you."

“Of course I forgive you ; but if you remember, it was I who was thrown upon your hands the other day, and very pleasant you made it — thank you.”

There was such a winsome light in her gentle eyes, such a glow of beauty about her as Howard Sargent never forgot. Many a time in the long years afterward, he lived that moment over again, and saw her as he saw her that night, — so young, so fresh, so hopeful, a girl, with all the hard lessons of her womanhood yet to learn. Even now — a middle-aged man, sitting with his middle-aged wife at his own hearthstone — he sees that girl again sometimes, in the old youth-light, and half wishes to go back to the old time, and the “something sweet” which better things may follow, but which itself goes on into other spheres and “can never come again.”

To them, standing under the gaslight, came presently Mrs. Carlyle, looking like a queen in her velvet and diamonds ; looking for one swift instant like a sad queen whose sceptre had departed, as she saw those two together. She knew well that it was nothing to her any more into what eyes Howard Sargent smiled and looked with the lingering gaze whose spell she knew. She was conscious that she ought not to care, and so the next moment she persuaded herself that she did not care ; but the soul of a woman is prophetic, and she knew, a great deal better than Sargent himself did, whither all this might tend. For herself, she had her duty to do. A woman who has occasion to think often of her duty is a woman to be pitied by

happier souls. The wife who loves does her duty without knowing it; but Arria Carlyle found it well to keep hers in mind constantly. She turned now to meet her husband, coming in, with a smile whose brilliancy was the atonement for the shadow which had preceded it.

"Do I please you?" she asked, going up to him with that gracefully anxious manner of hers, which certainly suggested that she had dressed for him only; and he looked her over with his dim, sixty-years-old eyes, and his undimmed enthusiasm, and said in a tone which had its own pathos, "You never yet failed to please me, Arria."

Then the arrivals began, and made a diversion.

The evening was like all other receptions in rich men's houses. Plenty of light and radiance and flowers, —

*"Flashing of jewels and flutter of laces,
Tropical odors sweeter than musk,
Men and women with beautiful faces,
And eyes of tropical dusk."*

Miss Revere could not help seeing that she was a social success; but she cared much less about it than most young girls would have done. A feeling, solemn and sweet, which she did not at all comprehend had already begun to grow into her heart, and was sure, whatever of pain might come in its wake, to save her from that laying herself out to attract general admiration which takes so surely the delicate bloom from the blossom. But, indeed, I think that in any case

Eleanor Revere would have carried herself too loftily for this.

She was amused and amazed to find the best society such a very commonplace fact, after all. The men and women were no brighter, better, or less human than those among whom she had grown up. She saw few gentlemen so thorough-bred and stately as her father; and even grave Miss Titus could have carried herself serenely with the best of them. Indeed, for Eleanor the chief interest of the occasion centred in the two whom she was visiting and their one familiar friend.

She found in the throng no woman so peerless as Arria, no man whom she could compare with Sargent; and Mr. Carlyle himself became romantic in her eyes from the simple pathos of the position. She was growing to see how madly he loved Arria, how trustfully and yet how hopelessly, — certain that he held her whole duty, and just as certain that he could never hold her heart, — to understand that saddest of all tragedies, when a man standing on the very shore of death turns back to clutch desperately at a world slipping away from him, and pour out his lees of life, his whole tortured, longing soul, at the feet of a woman who should have been his daughter. Reading all this in the look which followed Arria wherever she moved, Eleanor's brown eyes grew troubled, and Howard Sargent noticed it, and came to her.

"Flower o' the Peach," he said, "is there sawdust in your doll? It is only the common lot. Mine bled sawdust long ago. They are all stuffed with it."

Nell answered his question with another, "Why did Mrs. Carlyle marry her husband?"

"Why, Peach-blossom, have you brought no more originality with you from the abodes of the aborigines? All the world has asked that question for ten years, and it has grown very old now. Suppose we vary it. Why was he fool enough to marry her?"

"Because he loved her; and they say love is a kind of madness. But she —"

"Ah! don't finish your sentence! Silence is golden there. Could Mrs. Carlyle possibly do her duty so perfectly if she did not love her husband?"

"There is an expression of scorn on your face, Mr. Sargent, which is very unbecoming. I am not at all sure that you understand Mrs. Carlyle."

"That *would* be too difficult for me perhaps, without practice. I don't know much of women. You, I think, are less complex than Arria. Suppose I begin my studies by trying to understand you?"

"You may *try*."

She laughed a gay little laugh as she spoke, which, innocent of all art as she was, piqued Sargent and lured him on as well as the most finished art could have done. He hovered near her all the rest of the evening, enjoying her success, appreciating her freshness and singleness of purpose, and feeling vaguely that though he might never taste again one magic draught which had been spilled long ago on desert sands, it was yet among the possibilities that this young girl should hold another to his lips very sweet and pleasant.

IV.

IN WHICH MR. CARLYLE ASKS A QUESTION.

THE next morning Miss Revere found that her voice had failed her. Not knowing the insidious treachery of the climate around Boston, she had failed to guard against it, and wearing a low-necked, short-sleeved dress for the first time since her childhood, had gone near open windows and lingered recklessly, after dancing, in pleasant cooling draughts. The result was the sorest of sore throats, swollen eyes, and a general misery which made her feel that her own room must be her refuge. After breakfast, Mrs. Carlyle came to sit with her, scolded her pleasantly for her last night's imprudence, and then said playfully, "I'll give you just six days in which to get well. In the mean time, I shall break all my engagements; but next Thursday night is Mrs. Saltonstall's grand reception, and for *that* you must be well enough."

"But if you break all your engagements and stay at home with me, I shall be so uncomfortable that I shall never get well."

"No, you will be nothing of the kind. If you knew how thankful I am for a vacation sometimes!"

Nell was silent for a moment, until amazement got the better of diffidence.

"Is it possible that you don't like going about?" she asked.

"Why? Does it seem so very charming to you?" Mrs. Carlyle retorted, smiling.

"No, it was not that, but —" Nell stopped short with a blush.

"Go on, child, and tell me just what is in your mind. You will not vex me. Am I an enigma to you?"

Eleanor plunged on boldly.

"I have always heard of you as constantly in society, the leader of your set; and if it is a weariness to you —"

"You don't understand why I should keep it up? Well, little maiden, one must do something. Utter idleness is more wearisome still. And what is there for me but society? It is the one only thing for which I have a genius. I don't care deeply for books. I have no turn for philanthropy. My house is kept for me better than I could keep it myself; and my arms are empty. Once, for a week long, I had a little child in them; and I think my best chance for happiness went when she was taken away. I've been very gay since then; but you need not grudge me my little vacation between now and Thursday."

While they were talking, Nell heard a horse ridden rapidly up to the house, and looking just then at Mrs. Carlyle, she saw a sudden crimson flush her face. Two minutes afterward a servant knocked at the door.

"Mr. Sargent is downstairs, and would like to see the ladies."

Then Nell sent a message, and Mrs. Carlyle went

down to receive him. The girl lay back on her pillows and wondered.

Had Howard Sargent ever loved Mrs. Carlyle? What did they feel for each other now? What was it Mr. Carlyle's eyes always asked for and always missed? Through all this questioning, her tenderest sympathy clung to Arria. Why had Heaven made her so beautiful and so sad? Why was there nothing in the world for her to do and enjoy? Why was she married to this man, whom so evidently she could not love? and why had not even her child been left to help to make its father dear?

Meantime, Sargent, downstairs, was saying, "So the pretty novice is ill? *Very* pretty she is, Mrs. Carlyle."

"Yes, and *very* conscious of it you are. How fortunate it is for you that you are still young and impressionable! I feel as if I were a hundred years old for all the interest I take in new people. A man might be handsome as Apollo and as beguiling as Aaron Burr, and I should be as unmoved as if he were neither."

"You forget that you have the ægis of matrimony to protect you. You are anchored. I am but a pleasure-craft, at liberty to seek whatever shores tempt."

Mrs. Carlyle did not speak, — as I have said, she was not a woman of many words, — but she looked at him with something in her eyes which moved him more than any spoken reproach. When he spoke

again, it was with no mocking cadence, but very earnestly.

“You, Arria, ought to wish that pretty faces could be more to me than the fleeting show they are; that some wounds were not so long in healing, and when healed did not leave behind them such awful numbness.”

“They *are* healed, then?”

The voice through which the keen pain throbbed audibly was scarcely louder than a whisper, — so low, indeed, that Sargent felt justified in ignoring it altogether; and turning to the piano, and drumming out an accompaniment with one hand, he began to sing, —

“‘Love is hurt with jar and fret;
Love is made a vague regret.
Eyes with idle tears are wet;
Idle habit links us yet.
What is love? for we forget:
Is it so?’

“Arria, why did you never care more about Tennyson?”

“I suppose because I had no gift for enthusiasm. I never cared much about any thing but one.”

It seemed impossible for Sargent not to be bitter when she touched ever so lightly the chord of old memories. He chose to appear to misunderstand her.

“How very fortunate Mr. Carlyle is!” he said; “that is, if it be not disrespectful to speak of him as a thing.”

“I certainly could not mean to speak disrespectfully

of my husband, when I know him to be so well worthy of all respect," Mrs. Carlyle answered proudly; and a certain ice of dignity came into her manner which had not been there before conscience pricked her. It was the one honest purpose of her life to do her duty in the station to which she had called herself; and just here and now she experienced an ignominious sense of failure.

Soon Sargent got up to go away. Nell, all alone upstairs, heard his horse led round, and went to the window to watch him off. She saw him mount, look back, and nod a gay good-by toward the house, then canter down the avenue.

He came out again several times, ostensibly to inquire for Nell; but he sat each time in Mrs. Carlyle's morning-room for an hour, falling, now that once more the occasion favored, into the old habit of constant association, which before Nell came had begun to be one of the trials of Job Carlyle's life.

Sargent had been a struggling lawyer at the time of Arria's marriage, pursuing eagerly whatever business came in his way, and with little time for anything else. Mrs. Carlyle had not needed to struggle for the social pre-eminence which had been immediately accorded to her own beauty and her husband's wealth; so that she became at once a leader in society, and for a long time the woman of the world and the hurried man of affairs had met but seldom. Whatever of sentiment had been between them in the past had not come to Mr. Carlyle's knowledge, and its ghost therefore did not

trouble him. He was madly in love with his wife; and in those early days was full of hope that his generous faith and his untiring devotion would win her heart in time. It was the act of a man in his dotage to marry a woman with no better security for his happiness than this; but how many men, all along the world's history, have drunk from Circe's cup, and turned fools or mad?

Within a few years after their marriage, he had taken Arria abroad, and had been proud of her everywhere. In Rome, in Florence, in brilliant Paris, he had seen no fairer face. And he saw that no one came nearer to her than himself, — that the Venus Victrix in the Louvre was not more unmoved by her worshippers; and while his pride in her grew daily, and his sad, despairing love for her ached in his tired heart, he began to doubt whether it was in her nature to take a real, vital interest in any living man. In one way this lack promised safety, and offered a sorrowful comfort; but the old man who loved her had asked for bread, and had been given, instead, a stone.

Before they came back from Europe, Howard Sargent had inherited an entirely unexpected fortune from a queer client, — a man without kith or kin, whom he had served faithfully as a lawyer, and then cheered through the tedium of a long illness as a friend. One morning Sargent awoke and found himself rich. "How the gods tantalize us by sending all our good gifts too late!" he said to himself a little unthankfully. By that time he had become a success in his

profession. A fortune of his own making was assured to him so he but worked for it; and now suddenly all incentive to work was taken away. His first resolve was to go on in his own career, and either not to touch the money, or to give it grandly to some needy charity; but after dinner he began to feel that to work only when one chose and as one chose was an advantage not to be despised. He concluded not to turn his back on a bed of roses, and so entered into his possessions with self-congratulation.

When the Carlyles came back, therefore, he was quite ready to cultivate the society of his cousin Arria, and become the friend of the family. He believed that the old wound was thoroughly healed, — that she was no more to him than other handsome women, except in so far as she was handsomer than other women. The pity of it was, as he had told her, that the heart which had outgrown the pain of its wound was numb. He had become cynical. He sneered at women a little, was amused rather than touched by them. Arria's attempts to do all her wifely duties it entertained him to watch; and to look at her beauty was as good as living in an art gallery. So he went out to Longwood often, and after a while something of discomfort, which yet he would have scorned to call jealousy, was aroused in Job Carlyle by his frequent presence.

Miss Revere's coming had been a welcome diversion; and it was true that she had interested Sargent more than any one he had met since the old, old days when he believed in Arria.

He had thought faith in women no longer possible to him; but he had faith in Nell in spite of himself. Her frank innocence, her fresh, yet wise simplicity, were as patent to him as her beauty. He felt the womanliness in her. If she loved, she would love long and well; she would "not love amiss." But of trying to win her for himself he did not so early begin to think. He was almost twice as old as she. From the altitude of his superior years and his superior wisdom, it pleased him to look down on her as at a gay little butterfly sporting its summer day in the sun.

Now, however, that she was ill, and he could not watch her, his interest went back to Arria; and he saw something new in her manner, — a suppressed passion, a struggle which she tried to conceal, a disquiet which was preying on her very beauty. How much did she feel? Her few words revealed little. Did she regret the past? Was the splendor for which she had sold herself, the society in which she shone, a weariness to her? Was this discontent her prevailing mood, or only something which now and then, evoked by his presence, looked furtively out of her eyes or trembled, a plaintive minor chord, in her voice? The very silence which was so natural to her allured him with its provocation; and he began to be keenly interested about what might chance to enlighten him in their next meeting.

If Nell had gone away in those days, I wonder whether he would ever have thought much more about her? I fancy that at least he would have remembered

her as the most fresh and innocent and altogether guileless girl he had ever known. As for her, she was thinking about him, even in those early days, more than she realized, and more than was quite good for her. The color was coming back to her cheeks, and before the day of Mrs. Saltonstall's party she was quite ready to come downstairs, and go on with her own little life-drama.

On the last day of her seclusion, Mr. Carlyle, coming home early to dinner, found Sargent, as he so often had before, in his wife's morning-room. He had long felt a vague pain over the closeness of this intimacy which he had never yet put into words. But to-day some expression in his wife's face struck home to him a sudden knowledge of the truth. When the visitor was gone, he sat down by Arria with something masterful and compelling in his face and manner which was new to her, and roused her to curious attention.

"Arria," he said very calmly, "were you ever in love with that man?"

Mrs. Carlyle was a brave woman; and with women truth is so often a mere question of courage. She had no fear of any blow which could be dealt to her by other hands than Sargent's, and she did not falter.

"Yes," she said slowly, "I was."

"And he with you?"

"He said so."

"Engaged to him perhaps?"

"No, it never came to that. We understood from the first that circumstances were against us. My uncle

was willing enough to provide for me until I should marry, but he would do nothing for me afterward. I was not fit for a poor man's wife, — not good enough or unselfish enough. I should only have been a clog upon him; and the love was simply a misfortune to be outgrown."

Job Carlyle was silent for a space. Then he said with a look in his eyes which his wife never forgot, "When you married me I knew that you did not love me; but I had a hope that you would, in time. If I had known what you have told me now, I should have understood my chance better. Why did you not tell me?"

"Simply because it was a thing dead and done with. To know it would not have done you any good or made you any happier. Can you tell me honestly that it would have turned you from me, — changed your course by one hair's breadth?"

Job Carlyle looked down into the depths of his own heart. In his soul he knew that if all had been told him he would still have gone on, his strong love compelling him. He was honest enough to say so.

"I think I should have done just the same. I loved you with a love which was my fate."

"Then I was kinder to you when I kept my own secret."

"Then surely you would have been kinder to keep it still."

"Who questioned me, and so made the kindness of silence impossible?"

“Why did you lead me to doubt and to question by a constant association which I was utterly at a loss to explain? Howard Sargent is a man of power. His business, but for his own carelessness of it, would be engrossing. What except love, past or present, could bring him away from it day after day, to sit in a married woman’s morning-room and talk sentiment?”

Mrs. Carlyle’s face turned white, and a spark of passionate fire kindled her level eyes.

“Do you think I am likely to deceive you? Have I not given you proof this morning that I shall tell you the truth, cost what it will?”

“I have never questioned your truthfulness, Arria,” he answered in a tone of penitent humility which should have touched her, but did not, for while her anger burned she was remorseless. I told you in the first place that when once her acquiescent, indolent temperament was roused, it was roused to a headlong recklessness women of different natures would find it hard to understand. She spoke now in a low, clear voice, but every word she uttered went home.

“Grant that I loved Howard Sargent once; does that make me ready to degrade myself by talking sentiment with him, now that I am your wife? Yes, I did love him. I am proud of it; I glory in it. It was the one romance in my life, — the one thing that ever taught me that I was a woman with a woman’s heart. It was for his sake more than my own that I did not marry him. Since I have been your wife, I have done my duty to you faithfully. Between Sar-

gent and me no word has ever passed, no look, which would dim the brightness of that old memory and make it a thing of shame, instead of the joy and triumph and glory it will be to me forever."

"And you never loved me, and never will."

The old man, on whom twenty added years seemed to have fallen in an hour, said these woful words not as a question to which he expected reply, but rather as the sorrowful acceptance and declaration of a sorrowful truth; but Arria answered them, her voice and face softening a little at last.

"Not as *you* mean. I was done with that very long ago. But I have meant to make you happy. I have tried to do my duty; and I will try still. Sargent is my cousin, my old friend, and will very surely be some other woman's lover, Nell's perhaps; but since his presence here is painful to you, he shall not come."

"No, no. Let him come. Do you think I care now? He cannot rob me of what I never had."

And the old, old man, on whom so many years had fallen suddenly, bent hopelessly and helplessly under their weight, no longer holding himself alert and erect, — a man who felt that something was expected of him, and tried resolutely to live up to another person's ideal. Nothing was expected of him, he knew that, now; nothing ever would be, and he had nothing to expect. He went away sorrowful and very heavy; and Arria, as passionate in her remorse as she had been in her scorn, threw herself face downward and sobbed like a heart-broken child, — no, rather

with such bitter, scalding tears as no child ever weeps, for they belong only to womanhood.

"He loves me truly," she said to herself; "he only, perhaps, out of all the world, and I have broken his heart."

How thankful she was when Nell sent word that she felt able to come down to dinner, and she knew that she was reprieved from meeting her husband alone again that day.

V.

MRS. CARLYLE'S FRIEND.

SARGENT called the next morning, partly because the daily luxury of sitting an hour with Arria was fast becoming a daily necessity, and partly to find out whether the presence of the only two ladies in whom he was interested at Mrs. Saltonstall's party would make his own going there worth his while; for he was a social sybarite, and never bored himself with going anywhere, unless sure beforehand of some compensating interest.

He found Nell alone. Mrs. Carlyle had driven into town, ostensibly to order some toilet matters for the evening; really because she wished to make to her husband the concession of being absent when Sargent was likely to come. Illness had made Nell frail and fair. She looked like a mediæval saint, Sargent thought, and he experienced the difficulty one always

finds after an interregnum in getting back to precisely the old footing. He had no impulse to jest with her as he used, nor had he anything to say of serious import.

Nell was puzzled and a little hurt. She remembered how freely they used to talk, and felt that some new distance removed him from her. He went away, after a shorter call than usual, and before long Mr. Carlyle came. The iron had entered into his soul. He did not feel like taking up the daily burdens of his life. One by one it seemed well to him to let them slip from his shoulders. To-day he had confided to an agent some matters to which he had hitherto always attended himself, and had then come home.

He was not coming home to any love; he knew that. He had been wont sometimes to cheat himself with pleasant hopes that Arria was beginning to care for him. Sometimes, after she had bidden him good-by in the hall, he had gone away almost happy; and when he had returned and chanced to find her alone, her welcome had been very sweet to him. But all that was ended now; these little fictions had been shrivelled up in the fire of yesterday. How he regretted them, delusions though they were! To be cheated his life through would have been bliss. And now there was nothing to hope for, — not even the delight of being deceived. He met Sargent riding toward town, and looked at him not unkindly. He seemed to go utterly out of himself, and see clearly what concerned those two others.

"Poor Arria!" he said to himself; "if Sargent had but had his fortune then, or if she had waited a little longer. It came too late; and now her splendid, beautiful life must be spoiled because of her youth's rashness. Unless —" Just then a thought struck him which had never occurred to him in the same light before. He was an old man. He had been trying to live down the truth; but still he *was* an old man. What if he should die before Sargent had formed any other ties? It was sure that he must die soon. For a moment he was almost tempted to drive back and overtake the other, and tell him that Arria loved him, beg him to wait for her just the little while it would be before the old man should cease to cumber the ground. But something, some lingering pride perhaps, or some subtle, lurking, quite unconscious jealousy, withheld him. He let Sargent go on his way and drove himself to Longwood. He found Miss Revere alone in his wife's room, and with the instinct of gentle breeding endeavored to put aside his own brooding thoughts, and behave as became a courteous host.

"Mrs. Carlyle has gone into town to make some purchases," Eleanor explained.

"And you, I suppose, have had Mr. Sargent for company? I met him."

"Yes, he made a short call."

The conversation stopped there; for not even the instinct of courtesy could long withdraw Mr. Carlyle from his own sad thoughts.

A longing tormented him to tell his story to this young girl, who could judge Arria clearly, as he always fancied one woman must be able to judge another, and ask her whether it seemed to her that there could ever be any hope for him. He was confronted by the memory of what "ever" meant in his case, — a few weeks, a few months possibly, — an old man's lees of life. He must have been in his second childhood to think of asking her.

He fell then into a sad reverie about the near days, when all the world might be full of stir and bustle and he not know it; when sun and rain should be no more to him than they were to last year's leaves; when night and day would be alike, and alike eternal, and the things he had missed in this life, good or bad, would be missed forever. Would all go on just the same when he was there no longer? Would any one else care for Arria patiently, unselfishly, as he had done? Sargent indeed might be her lover, but who would be her friend? He drew nearer to Eleanor and spoke to her, his hands shaking with eagerness, his voice trembling.

"I am glad you know my wife," he said. "I think you love her. Promise me when I am gone to be her friend. She will have everything else, but she has no mother or sister; and she will need a friend sorely when I have left her. It will be so soon."

"Oh, don't, Mr. Carlyle!" Eleanor cried with frightened face. "Don't talk so! It is too dreadful!"

"Not dreadful at all, my dear. You and I both

know that I am an old man ; and old people have to look death in the face, and make ready for it. I should like to feel that you would always care for Arria. Will you?"

"I do ; I will," the girl answered solemnly, feeling as if a breath from the very grave were touching her.

"God bless you, child !" he said, and took for a moment her young smooth hands into his old withered ones ; and just then Arria came home.

Mr. Carlyle did not go with the ladies to Mrs. Saltonstall's party. Hitherto he had borne himself bravely through such weary scenes, as the husband of a young wife, — a man from whom something was expected, and whose reward might yet be to come. Now he felt that he had been worsted in the struggle of life, and he was ready to give up the fight. Hope had died ; and now nothing was expected of him but to die in his turn.

He excused himself from the party on the plea of feeling less well than usual. Arria offered to stay with him ; but he assured her that his illness was not serious, and that rather than keep her at home he should go with her, unlike it as he certainly felt. She went back after she had her foot on the step of the carriage to speak to him.

"May I kiss you good-night?" she asked, with a new, piteous humility. "Indeed, I do care for you very much."

He kissed her fondly, looking for an instant, with eyes an old man's ready tears made dim, at her bright

loveliness, — the one thing the world held, so it seemed to him, worth a man's living or dying for.

"God bless you, dear!" he said, touching with trembling fingers her shining hair. "Do not think I blame you, or that I do not know you have tried to make me happy."

In the dressing-room at Mrs. Saltonstall's Mrs. Carlyle looked critically at Eleanor. The girl wore her sea-green silk, with laces like sea-foam, and pearls rifled from the sea. Her cheeks were of that pure transparent pink which everybody compares to the heart of a sea-shell, because there is nothing else so like it. Her bright yellow hair had been made the most of under Laurette's skilful fingers. Arria thought she looked as if she never could grow old or fade; her beauty was that of the immortals.

"How lovely you are!" she said abstractedly.

Eleanor laughed. "No, indeed. I am only a tolerably pretty girl in her first youth, as you know very well when you see me at home by daylight. The rest comes of the hour and my toilet. But I'm glad if I please you."

And then they went downstairs, Eleanor thinking all the way how gracious and generous Mrs. Carlyle was — how ready with her admiration, how perfect in her sympathy — till she felt almost as if she could be willing to lay down her young, radiant life to bring happiness to this, her friend.

Sargent met them in the ante-room, and took them in to their hostess. They were the two loveliest

women there, and he felt a certain pride of proprietorship in them both. But he was allowed very little of Nell's company after all. She was certainly making the sensation he had predicted for her when she first came to Longwood. In especial, the son of the house, young Ralph Saltonstall, just through college, hovered round her all the evening, wickedly evading the law his mother had laid down for him in advance, selfishly shirking the duty of generally diffusing himself, to sun himself in the rays of this bright particular star.

Sargent's righteous soul was vexed with indignation. He had never yet admitted to himself that he cared especially for this little girl half his own age, and of late too Arria had influenced his thoughts more than was well; but the little girl must not be thrown away, and certainly this Saltonstall, this sprig of the *jeunesse dorée*, this purposeless *petit-maitre*, was not the one for her. Of course, he did rank injustice to Saltonstall, who was an uncommonly frank, high-minded, generous fellow, his only fault being that venial one of youth, of which he was sure to mend daily. The senior regarded this pardonable defect with little charity, and kept himself sufficiently near to watch the course of events.

Evidently, Nell liked Saltonstall. It was in a frank, genial, pleased way, as a girl naturally does like any agreeable young man who likes her, but a way which men cannot or will not understand. Arria, watching too, knew by some subtle magnetism every thought of Sargent's heart, scoffed a little secretly at his want

of perception, half pitied him, and then, when she began to realize how anxiously she was watching him, began to think it might indeed be quite as well for him to stay away from Longwood.

But no secret pain of her own made her unjust to Nell. She judged the girl fairly, even in her own heart. She saw that she was as free from coquetry as from vanity, and that to be young and fresh and pretty was no fault of hers. She proved herself the most gracious and thoughtful of chaperones; and happy Nell began to think that to be an immortal butterfly in an eternal summer would be Paradise enough.

Once, while Saltonstall had gone away to fetch something, Sargent came lazily up to Nell's side. She had seen him sitting indolently in a corner with Arria, and then lingering on there alone, after his companion had been spirited away by some dancing man. Now, therefore, she reproached him with his idleness. He smiled quizzically.

"So you think I shirk my duties to society? What do you think society wants of me?"

"Why, that you should make yourself agreeable. For what else do you suppose Mrs. Saltonstall asked you?"

"She asked me because I gained her husband's last great railroad suit for him; and now that I am here, she cares for nothing but that I should take thankfully the goods the gods provide me, and go home."

"But don't you want to have a good time, yourself?"

Nell asked with simple curiosity, like the child she so often seemed.

"After my lights, yes; but it's not my conception of having a good time to bore myself with those who do not interest me, and unhappily, so few persons do."

"So few?" with a little intonation of inquiry.

"Yes, just about two in this world, I think, and both of those women."

Just then Saltonstall came up with an ice, and the elder man bowed and moved away.

Driving home in silence that night, by Mrs. Carlyle's side, Nell found herself forgetting young Ralph Saltonstall's flattering whispers to wonder who Sargent's engrossing interests were. If he had said one, he must have meant Arria; for she remembered still the look on his face when she found him for the first time in Mrs. Carlyle's morning-room,—the look she had seen now and then since, when Arria was talking to him—but the other? Could it be possible that he cared for her too a little? She was almost sure he meant her to think so. Poor silly butterfly, was it worth a heart-throb if he did?

VI.

A SUDDEN SHOCK.

Two or three weeks of life went on very gayly after this for butterfly Nell. She wore her pretty dresses, she sang, she danced, she had no end of amusement, no

end of admiration. Young Saltonstall came to Longwood once and again, and hovered round her wherever they met, while Mrs. Carlyle smiled on him sweetly, wished him success in her heart, and by some feminine diplomacy made him understand that she did so. Sargent held himself a little aloof, and looked on like a scornful autocrat, growing daily in cynicism.

"After all," he thought, "girls are much alike. It matters little who comes, so he come first, and do not come empty-handed."

He began to feel that he had been unjust toward his cousin Arria, who after all had but been faithful to the traditions of her kind, not less constant or more selfish than the rest; and into his manner toward her there grew a sort of penitential tenderness which sometimes touched her more than was well.

One day both men chanced to be there at lunch, and afterward there was a little division of the *partie carrée*, as often happened. Mr. Carlyle was not at home; and Sargent followed Arria into one room, while Saltonstall stood beside Eleanor at the window of another, and watched the leaves whistling down the late autumn wind.

"What a thing it is," Saltonstall said, "to be young, with nothing special on one's conscience, and all the chances of love and life before one."

"What a thing it is," Nell answered, "to be well over with them all,—to feel that one will never be tempted any more, or suffer any more, but that one's work is done, and one can enter into rest."

Could this be butterfly Nell? Saltonstall looked at her with wondering eyes.

"Why, you might talk like that," he said, "if your hair were silver instead of gold."

"No, I might not talk so, then, — I might cling to it all as desperately as I see old people often do; but, in truth, though I am very happy, it does often seem terrible to me to look on and on through the years. Sometimes when I think of growing old, and of all the changes between, of one charm slipping from me after another, and one pleasant thing after another losing its savor, I fancy that it would be a blessed fate to shut one's eyes on life, as my mother did, just when it was at its brightest, — to die a sudden, undecaying death."

"Did she die so?" Saltonstall asked softly, feeling as if Nell had never been so near to him as now, when she folded her glancing wings, and gave him one glimpse of her as she was.

"Yes, in the summer of the year and of her life. My father found her lying dead with a happy smile upon her lips. It was before I was old enough to remember her; but she had never known anything save happiness and goodness, and in her sleep she was taken into blessedness."

Saltonstall was silent. His life had been blameless beyond that of most young men; but there would have been blank terror to him in the thought of going so suddenly into the reality which is eternal. And yet this young girl, with whom he had danced so often

to gay waltz music, whose butterfly beauty and grace had so charmed him, appeared to look on this sudden translation as a very gift from God. How much better she must be than he! She seemed to him more woman and less child from that hour, and the need of looking up being inherent in his nature, — as indeed it was in hers, — he began to make of her a goddess, and build to her a shrine.

“I think your *débutante* is getting on,” Sargent said to Arria with a little playful mockery in his tone, as he glanced through the open door at the two standing in the window. “Under your tuition she is sure to become accomplished in the game of hearts.”

Mrs. Carlyle looked at him for a silent moment. He saw that she was trembling, and a dangerous light was in her eyes. He had seen her in that mood before, and understood its recklessness.

“You have always done me injustice,” she said in her deep, even voice, which never lost its subtle minor music, however she was moved. “I will speak plainly at last. I did love you in those old days with the best love of my life, and so loving you, I was wicked enough to marry Mr. Carlyle. But do you think I gave you up for my own sake? No, it was for yours. I was not fit to be the wife of a struggling man. I should have been a millstone round your neck. I would not have minded poverty for myself, except that I knew I should lose through it every charm for you. I knew your nature was not generous enough to love on, when my beauty should be unadorned and all

its brightness gone and you saw in me merely a helpless, inefficient woman to whom you were bound. So for your sake, I married a man who loved me better. Do you think I do not know how much more his love is worth than yours, — a love which no coldness or disappointment could kill? Do you think I have gone on loving *you*, — you, a mocker, a cynic, a worshipper of yourself?"

"‘You have said that you should be sorry for,’" quoted Sargent, and then he strolled into the other room.

"I'm off now," he said to Saltonstall. "If you are going soon, suppose we ride into town together?"

So the horses were led round, and the two men went away.

Then Nell walked into the room where Mrs. Carlyle was, and saw the cheeks aflame, the eyes in which the dangerous light still glittered.

"Men, like republics, are ungrateful," Arria said with a mocking cadence which seemed as if she had borrowed it from Sargent. "I saved my cousin Howard once from marrying an utterly unsuitable wife, and he has never forgiven me. We have been sparring a little this morning, and I am tired. I think I will go upstairs and rest for an hour before I dress for dinner."

So she went away, and Nell lingered on in the pleasant, leaf-green morning-room, wherein it was always summer. She wondered for a moment whether the wife from whom Mrs. Carlyle had saved Sargent

could have been any other than herself, and then became sure that it must have been Arria and no other. But why had he never forgiven her? Could it be that he cared for her so much still? And she — no wonder Job Carlyle's eyes asked forever, and forever asked vainly, for his wife's love. What had he to hope from the woman who had been so dear to Sargent? Who that Sargent loved could help loving Sargent? Why, he was as handsome as a god, and as strong and fearless and noble. One could so look up to him; and this looking up, being the great need of her nature, seemed to her the crown of loving. What a strange world it was! Her heart began to ache with a deep unutterable pity for them all, — for herself too, poor little girl. Why was it one could never have what one wanted in life? And then she thought again of her mother, to whom so much had been given, — perfect love, and then perfect rest, — and it seemed to her, as it often had before, that no one had ever been so happy as this dead woman, who had tasted all that was best in life, and then laid down the cup, its lees untasted forever.

It was rather a silent dinner that day. A suspicious brightness still lingered in Arria's eyes and flushed her cheeks, but she did not speak an unnecessary word. Nell tried to talk a little, out of her sense of duty, but Mr. Carlyle's manner was grave and preoccupied; and she soon saw that her small exertions to entertain were by no law of courtesy required of her, and she too lapsed into silence. But something singular in Mr.

Carlyle's face led her to watch him. He had the expression of a sleep-walker, she thought. It seemed to her that though he did certain things mechanically, he looked at all objects without seeing them.

At last, still watching that curious, introverted look on his face, she saw him try to carry a glass of wine to his lips, saw it waver, and its clear amber stream over his hand. Then it fell to his plate with a crash; and then, before any one could speak or move, he had slipped from his chair and lay prone upon the floor, helpless and breathing heavily.

The servants lifted him and carried him away to his chamber. His wife followed, white as death, shrinking in every nerve. To Eleanor, as to most women in an emergency not personal to themselves, presence of mind remained. She sent at once for a physician, ordered all the resources of the establishment in the way of restoratives, and then went to share Arria's watch beside her husband.

It was almost an hour before the physician arrived, and in the mean time all that unmedical skill could suggest had been tried in vain, without the slightest alleviation of the fearful symptoms.

When at last Dr. Lewis came, he took rapid note of all the details, then turned to Nell, as the one who seemed most capable of understanding and answering him clearly. "It is paralysis," he said. "Do you know of any special cause,—any recent trouble or excitement?"

"Not any. He was eating dinner very quietly,—

not talking at all, in fact; and it came over him with awful suddenness."

Then Arria lifted her blanched face from the pillows and spoke. It seemed to her that her voice would go no farther than the roof of her mouth. Her lips seemed stiff and strange, but she forced the words from them.

"He did have a trouble. Three weeks ago I said something to him which shocked him dreadfully. He has seemed to live in a dream ever since; but it has been so long since then. *Could* it have been that?"

The doctor looked at the utterly wretched, death-white face raised to wait for his verdict. He gave it, — not in truth, but in compassion. I do not justify him; but it is hard to turn the weapon in a wound, and one is tempted to evade such tasks.

"Oh," he said, "that was so long ago. I meant anything which might have happened just now. More likely it runs in his family. Paralysis is the fate of some families, as consumption is of others. But you must not give up all hope. This is his first shock, is it not?"

"Oh, yes; his first. He has been quite well."

"And very often the first shock is not fatal."

Dr. Lewis did not think it necessary to add that the first shocks from which he had seen patients recover had never been of the nature of this one. Sure as he was in his own mind that Job Carlyle's life was only a question of hours or days, he yet shrank from say-

ing so to those watching women. He was not a man from whom to ask stern truths; his nature was incapable of them; and so he failed of the highest standard for a physician, for surely to tell bitter truths tenderly is not less needful than to give bitter drugs wisely, if a man aspire to minister to those who are about to enter the world of truth.

But Dr. Lewis was kind, and, save in this one matter of sparing himself pain, unselfish. He stayed at Longwood until morning, using vainly all his arts of healing, and then went away, promising to return in a few hours with a faithful nurse.

VII.

THE HOUSE OF SHADOWS.

DR. LEWIS, on his next visit, found the case of Mr. Carlyle as baffling as ever. There had been no glimmer of recognition or consciousness, no slightest change which an unmedical eye could perceive; and if the doctor's keener insight detected any, he did not comment upon it. He brought with him the promised nurse, a middle-aged, responsible-looking woman, who took her place at once at the bedside, and kept it as time went on, weary day after weary day.

There was a week during which there had been no change except a gradual weakening of the pulses. Arria sat from morning till night—motionless as a woman carved out of stone—by her husband's bed, but inwardly she was torn by conflicting emotions.

She had never felt toward him so tenderly as now. Forever she was haunted by the look on his face when he said to her, "And you never loved me, and never will!"

Could it have been that blow which had stricken him, — brought him to this? Dr. Lewis said not; but did Dr. Lewis know? She thought if the choice were given her, she would gladly lay down her own life to see him well again, and to feel that she had not wrecked his happiness. And I believe that she would have done this; for to lay down one's life is a thing that one can well make up one's mind to do. Few causes are so unworthy that they cannot count their martyrs; but to live rightily is a hard thing to resolve on or to achieve. She hated herself intensely for even thinking of Sargent in those dark days; but in spite alike of her remorse and her resolves, the idea of him beset her like a spirit tempting to evil.

She knew that he came daily to the house, though no one told her. When she heard the beats of his horse's hoofs coming up the avenue, it seemed to her as if her heart were between them and the ground. Then she would see Nell slip silently away and go down to him for a moment. It was to answer his inquiries for Mr. Carlyle and herself, she knew; yet sometimes, watching beside that death-bed, she was nearly frantic with remorse because she could not keep herself from wondering whether in those daily interviews, those two, Sargent and Eleanor, grew any nearer to each other.

She need not have been troubled if she had known the truth. The shadow over the house was too awful for any thought of self-seeking to flourish in it. Nell had cared enough for her father's old friend to feel this doom which had overtaken him as a personal sorrow ; and Sargent was too full of sympathizing anxiety to pay much heed to the sad brown eyes under the tumbled, beautiful yellow hair, but received his daily bulletin very much as he would have done had the nurse gone down to him instead of Nell, and then went away, pitying Carlyle, sad at heart for Arria, and with a brooding desolate sense of the uncertainty of everything earthly. Still, perhaps unconsciously to himself, some sense of Nell's unselfish womanliness penetrated his perceptions, and helped to make up the image of her he was destined to carry in his heart through vacant years and spaces.

But Arria, poor, passionate, sad Arria, ready to die for her husband if she might, or to give all the world held for her to hear him speak her forgiveness, yet was tortured by the thought of Sargent, which haunted her against her will. Once, indeed, temptation went so far that she caught herself wondering if it were possible that he was to be taken from her just as she seemed likely to be alone and free. Had not his love for her been such as he would not feel again? And if she were free again, would he not — and then suddenly she realized with an awful, shuddering agony of contrition whither her thoughts were tending. She bowed her head, and a sense of shame and sin swept over her

and shook her like a reed. She went away to her own room, and fell there upon her knees; and from the depths of her humiliation a cry went up to a hearing and answering God to save her from herself. I think help was given in answer to her prayer; for afterward Sargent came and went unheeded, no more to her than an errant wind, while she sat through two more slow days and silent nights by her husband's side, praying ceaselessly for his life, and watching, watching, watching for some gleam of hope, some slightest sign which never came.

On the ninth morning after his attack, she opened her eyes with a start. She had been asleep in her chair for a few moments, exhausted by her long vigil, and in a dream she had forgotten all her trouble. Just at the last her husband had come into the dream, and she had fancied that he stood beside her again, and bent over her and kissed her, touching her hair, as he had that night of Mrs. Saltonstall's party, which seemed so long ago now, and saying, as he said then, "God bless you, dear! Do not think I blame you, or that I do not know you have tried to make me happy."

She awoke with a sudden start in the gray dawning, and it seemed to her that he was just taking his fingers from her hair; and then she was aware of a presence, vague and cold and awful, filling all the room. She started to her feet. The nurse was bending over Mr. Carlyle, and turned to speak to her.

"He's gone," she said, "just like blowing out a candle. I thought his face looked different, and I got up to see; and as I looked, it was all over."

"And did n't he speak, or seem to look round for any one?"

"No, dear heart, no. I knew how it would be from the first time I set eyes on him. I've seen so many such cases, you know."

"But the doctor gave us hope. He said they did recover sometimes, when they had had no shocks before; and I thought he might."

"They don't recover when they're taken as hard as he was, and not very often when they are so old. His years were ripe, and the Lord had need of him," she added piously, feeling that some such utterance belonged to her professional duty, and being better satisfied with herself after she had made it.

Arria felt as if her eyeballs were coals of fire; but she could not cry. She tried to stand on her feet and came near falling, her limbs were so unsteady. The nurse said afterward that she was frightened, Mrs. Carlyle looked so dazed. She made her lean upon her shoulder, speaking to her with kind authority, as she would have spoken to a child.

"You must let me take you to bed now," she said, leading her from the room.

Arria went on obediently until she came in front of Nell's door. There she stopped.

"Ask her to take me in," she said piteously. "I am afraid to be all alone."

And Nell opened her arms, and took the poor shivering creature close to her heart. They seemed to have changed places now. Nell became protector and counsellor for the time, though all her counsel was that Mrs. Carlyle should try to go to sleep. Sleep was long delayed; but when it came at last, heavy and troubled, Nell slipped the stricken head from her arm to the pillow, and rose and dressed herself hurriedly.

It was late in the morning, and she was expecting her father, to whom she had written an account of his old friend's state. The ten o'clock train was the earliest by which he could arrive after reading her letter, and she felt persuaded that it would bring him. She watched eagerly from the window. She had experienced so much, felt so much since she saw him, that the weeks seemed to her like as many years. She almost fancied they must have changed him as much as they had changed her; and she looked with surprise at his serene, unaltered face when she saw him coming up the avenue. In a moment she was in his arms, finding in them rest, comfort, strength. Of course, just like a woman, she began to cry; and being a wise man, he understood the good it did her, and held her gently until the paroxysm was over, and she was ready to tell him her story.

Mrs. Carlyle slept the long sleep of utter exhaustion, and when she came downstairs at nightfall, was inexpressibly comforted by the presence of her husband's old friend. Sargent had been there during the

day, as usual, and together the two had made all the necessary arrangements for the funeral.

Then more sad days came and went. Job Carlyle was gathered to his fathers; and Arria, in her close widow's weeds, looked like the meekest and saddest of nuns. And then, after a few more days had passed, Mr. Revere began to talk of taking Eleanor home.

Mrs. Carlyle had been dreading this departure from the first, but she felt too hopeless and despairing to try to prevent it. It seemed to her that she should go mad when the time came for her to be left alone, with only a silent old aunt of her dead husband's for company. Still, she thought that the tie between herself and Nell was not close enough to justify her in asking the young girl to linger on in the lonely house, where now no one came save Sargent, to make his brief calls of inquiry, or some visitor of condolence, with face disciplined to just the proper and polite expression of sadness. If she had but hinted a wish, Nell, who had loved her so well from the first, and now in her sorrow found her doubly dear, would have stayed gladly. But no such desire was expressed; and the day of departure came.

Sargent chanced to be there when they went away: and while he and Eleanor stood a little apart from the others, he spoke his good-by.

"I shall not forget you," he said, holding Nell's hand. "I think while life lasts I shall now and then be haunted by a vision of a girl, very young and sweet and fair, in a peach-blossom dress, standing

patiently under a gas-burner, waiting for my verdict. Well, God bless you, child, if you think I'm good enough to say so."

But he did not speak, had not spoken one word of love; and there was nothing loverlike in his manner. Nell thought she should never see him again. He had loved Arria once, and doubtless when her days of widowhood were over, he would go back to his old faith. And who could blame him? Who was there in the wide world like Arria?

Just then Arria came up to her, and Sargent moved away.

"Will you come to see me again sometime?" Mrs. Carlyle asked with that slow, pathetic voice of hers, — that wonderful voice, which dropped with excitement into yet lower tones than usual.

"I shall be glad to. I feel as if I were leaving my own sister."

"I wish you were my sister," Arria answered fervently, "and then I should have some real claim on you. You came to see a stranger; but when you come again I shall know it is because you like me enough to care to be my friend."

"He who loved you best of all wanted that we should be friends," Nell said timidly. "That day of Mrs. Saltonstall's party — how far off it seems now! — he told me that he should not be with you long, and after he was gone you would be very lonely, and he wanted me to be all to you that I could."

These words were like a voice from the dead to

Arria Carlyle, — a voice speaking peace. So, after all, — after he knew that she did not love him, and never could, — he had not only forgiven her, but taken thought for her lonely hours when he could never do anything to brighten them again. She took one solemn conviction, just then, into her heart, — that no man ever would or could love her as that dead man had, — a conviction which never left her in all her after-life. Perhaps to live thus in her memory Job Carlyle would have been willing enough to die.

So Eleanor went away. The pretty little winter comedy she came to play had turned into a tragedy and ended with a death. And all her gay days were over, and her butterfly robes were packed, and she was going back to Hampshire. Poor, pretty Nell!

VIII.

IN HER SPRING ON THAT SPRING DAY.

If one is to speak as on the witness-stand, one must confess that Miss Revere found Hampshire not quite what it used to be. She thought at first that she was glad to go back to its peace and its rest; but soon she felt them palling upon her. She loved her father still as dearly as of old. A little of Miss Titus's ice had thawed during her absence; and she found that severe spinster had learned, through missing her, her due value. But she had tasted the world's hashish, and after it she found other things savorless.

By the last of February, she had begun to say to herself that if spring did not come soon she should be desperate. She was tired of the cold, gray skies, of the white, whirling storms, and the great drifts that shut in the valleys. Early in March, a warm rain came, a thaw which lasted more than a week, and set free the brooks, melted the drifts, and made the beechen buds begin to swell. It seemed the promise of summer, and comforted her like the return of an old friend. She saw the tremulous, spring-foreboding haze in the air. The bare trees looked softer against the background of deep-toned sky.

She caught herself singing as she turned from the window, and read over Mrs. Carlyle's last note. She did not hear at all from any one she had left behind her save through these black-edged notes of Arria's, seldom and brief. They were little more than greetings and farewells, for Mrs. Carlyle was not one of the women to whom it is given to write letters. But they were a link with the past, to which Nell clung gladly. In this last one occurred a sentence which she read over more than once: —

“I see Sargent often, and he always speaks of you. He desires me to give his remembrances.”

Sargent saw Arria often; but also Sargent always spoke of her. Turn it over and over as she might, it was just that, no more. Mrs. Carlyle rarely betrayed herself by mouth or pen; she was too chary of her words. But something had anointed Eleanor's eyes

to behold new beauty in the white clouds that were swimming over the deep, lustrous blue of heaven ; and she put on cloak and hat and started through the March mud for a constitutional. She went where the long thaw had opened paths for her, and found two or three pale struggling hepaticas, which had pushed up through the half-frozen earth to bid her welcome ; and then she stopped where there was a little opening in the woods, and among the nut-trees and oaks and birches a high pine rose. She sat down on the moss and pine needles, which made a soft couch above its roots. There, presently, a subtly sweet odor surprised her ; and pulling away leaves and sticks with eager hands, she gathered the loveliest token of spring's victory over winter, a half-blown May-flower. Just then an adventurous bird, a runaway from some sheltered nest, turned explorer, paused on his way, as if he too had seen the flower and understood its language, and dropped down through the clear air one single note of triumph. Eleanor's heart beat quickly, and some dew of ecstasy, which felt like tears, suffused her happy eyes. It was spring with her still, as with the year ; and spring is good.

She went home blown into disorder by the north wind, and thoroughly tired, but with a glow on her cheeks and a light in her eyes which it rejoiced Miss Titus's heart to see when she met her at the door.

"There is a visitor for you in the parlor," she said softly. "Your father is with him, but he asked for you both."

Nell sped upstairs on feet that forgot their weariness. Of course it was Sargent; of course it could be no other. He had remembered her to some purpose, after all. She had been able to think of the probability of his loving and marrying Mrs. Carlyle with a good degree of composure. If it caused her any pain, she had never acknowledged it to herself, or wavered because of it in her love for Arria; but her heart fluttered strangely now as she brushed out her yellow hair.

She made herself pretty for her visitor in a trice, — worked some miracle of loveliness with the sunny tresses, put on a soft, dove-colored dress, and tied a peach-blossom ribbon at her throat for auld lang syne. Her cheeks were flower o' the peach too, as well as her ribbon, and her tender brown eyes beamed welcome. She went downstairs, and across the hall, opened the door, and a youth, handsome as Adonis, rose to meet her. She drew one breath of wonder, then she said, "What a charming surprise, Mr. Saltonstall!"

"If you will tell me that it is a pleasant one, I shall be paid several times over for all the pains I've taken to find out your abiding-place, and come after my welcome."

So, after all, it was Saltonstall and not Sargent who had borne her in faithful remembrance. Sargent could sit in Arria's morning-room and send her messages; but the other had really cared to see her again. She was too bewildered to talk, so she sat and listened and

looked at her visitor. He was on the best of terms with her father already. It appeared that his own father and Mr. Revere had been old friends; and friendships, like curses, have a way of descending to the second and third generation.

Nell thought she had never quite realized before how very handsome Saltonstall was, how graceful and agreeable he could make himself. She was too thorough a woman in her intuitions not to understand at once the meaning of his visit to Hampshire, and all that was within her reach if she chose to take it. What should she do? She was thankful to hear him say that he meant to spend two or three weeks in the neighborhood. She trusted that he would not ask her his question to-day or to-morrow, and she need not be hurried in her decision.

As one day after another passed on, she thought of him more and more kindly. She was touched by his faithful remembrance of her. With her girlish self-depreciation, she regarded his love for her as a great merit on his part. Where should she ever find such a heart again? Not in Sargent, surely; for on the first day of Saltonstall's visit she had asked him if he saw Mrs. Carlyle often, and he had answered, "Not often, though I went to see her to find where you were. Sargent is out there several times a week; and report has already betrothed them, with how good reason I do not know."

"Could they not wait till the first grass had grown on the dead man's grave?" Nell thought bitterly to

herself; and then she smiled very sweetly on Saltonstall the constant.

Nothing could be more suitable than a marriage between these two. They were both young and handsome, well-born and well-bred. Saltonstall was rich enough not to care for money, and Nell would not be portionless. His mother liked her, and was ready to welcome her with wide-opened arms. Her father was well pleased with Ralph. For once not a pebble obstructed the course of true love, — if only it were true love, that is.

For that was the question Nell spent more than a week in trying to solve. Certainly no other man was anything to her; she made this affirmation to herself with the persistent pride which belongs to refined womanhood. But she was constantly thinking that Ralph would be perfect if only he were different. If he were not quite so boyish, so undignified, and open! If he but had some cool depths of reserve! If he were more speculative, more analytic, more like a man!

The truth was that she had in her mind a standard of comparison to which, unconsciously to herself, she was continually submitting her lover.

His young impulsiveness would have seemed to most people far more attractive than Howard Sargent's self-control and cynicism, — only Nell did not find it so. Sugar-plums are doubtless sweeter than olives; but some people love olives who have no tooth for confections.

Fifty miles away, on one of those same March days, Howard Sargent and Mrs. Carlyle sat in a leaf-green room, playing together an interminable game of chess. Lifting in her hand the queen of the red chessmen, and pausing for a long survey of the board before she set the scarlet lady down again, Mrs. Carlyle said, —

“I should not be surprised if we were soon to have Miss Revere among us again.”

The quick interest which flashed into Sargent’s eyes did not escape the other eyes which were regarding him from under their veiling, jetty lashes.

“You have invited her?”

“No; but I think some one else has gone to save me the trouble. Young Saltonstall was out here last week to find out her local habitation, and perceiving that I was kindly disposed toward him, his secret overflowed from his boyish lips. He has cared for her from the first, it seems; and I suppose by this time he is sighing like a furnace at her feet.”

“And you think he will succeed?” Sargent asked with an eagerness of interest which he failed to conceal.

“I think so. Why not? She is of his age and of his kind. I do not see how a match could be more suitable.”

Sargent played on in silence for a while. At last he looked up and met Arria’s eyes. Some impulse moved him just then to tell her the truth.

“I came very near to loving that girl, myself; I believe nothing restrained me from throwing myself quite overboard except a chronic notion that a woman’s

faith was a rather insufficient life-preserver. Saltonstall has the rashness of youth, you see. I had it once. Your influence went far toward educating me, Arria. I have to thank you for caution and reserve and many another good quality besides."

Mrs. Carlyle swept the chessmen from the board and pushed it away.

"I am content to lose the game to you," she said. "My head is not clear enough to play."

"It is your turn to lose the game," he retorted with a look which pointed his meaning.

Then they sat for a time in silence. From the flowers in the bay-window came an odor as of summer gardens. A mocking-bird in a cage thought it was summer, and began to sing, and both Arria and Sargent seemed to listen to him idly, and neither spoke until he was silent again. Then, through the warm, flower-laden air Arria's voice fell softly, — her low voice, with the minor chord trembling through it.

"You taunt me with the past, and yet I have told you once that I acted then more for your sake than my own. From the first you did me injustice; but if it had been all my fault, do you think I have suffered no punishment? The wrong I did to you was light compared with that I wrought to my own soul, or to the good man whom I married without loving him. Do you think I have no conscience, — that I could receive all he gave me and not be tortured by it? Do you think I bore no cross, trying always to do my duty, and finding myself so weak?"

There had been a time in the dead years when that voice through which the pathos quivered, those passionate, troubled eyes of hers, would have swayed Sargent's very soul as a leaf is blown by the wind. Now, with the coolness of a man who loved no longer, he waited quietly for her gust of emotion to be over. She buried her face in her hands, and he saw her clasped fingers tremble; but he did not try to soothe her. He was an unforgiving man. He had indeed his own good qualities, and a charm which most women felt; but he was not quite the hero, at once knightly and gentle, that Eleanor liked to fancy him. Arria, who had loved him first, knew him best, and loved him still in spite of knowing him. To-day, with that steely glitter in his blue eyes, she felt him pitiless as Fate. She struggled with her own emotion and subdued it.

But if she wanted her revenge, she had it. He went away from Longwood thoroughly ill at ease. Till this day he had never quite known how much Nell was to him. He had thought often enough that he could love her if he were a man given to sentiment. Now he knew that he had loved her already; that this young girl to whom Saltonstall had gone wooing would be for him the chief prize the world held. But he took the matter quietly. He was not one to enter the lists with others. If Saltonstall could succeed, — and doubtless he could, — why, let him. He plunged into business for distraction, went deep into the mysteries of an important case, and showed a little of the

power which was in him, — a power which the circumstances of his too easy life kept in hiding for the most part, but which might well have made him a king among men.

Saltonstall, meanwhile, was lingering through lengthening days at Nell's side, taking things very happily for granted. Let what would come afterward, those days were pleasant ones, and though he might sometime be the sadder, he would never be the worse for them. In his eyes Nell wanted nothing of perfection. There might come other springs when the memories of these hours and days would be each one a separate pain ; when every bird-note which pierced the air would pierce his heart also ; when he would turn away from bursting bud and early flower with sad eyes, — but his to-morrows were far away, and to-day was good.

IX.

WHAT WILL SHE DO WITH HIM?

At last Nell began to long to have it all settled. Something — she thought it was delay — wore on her. She loved no one but Saltonstall ; this proud fact she kept constantly in sight. And he was so well suited to her that surely she ought to be entirely happy in his company. She wondered why her days tired her, and her nights failed to rest her, — why she was so feverish in the morning, so exhausted at bedtime.

In the midst of it all he was telegraphed for to Bos-

ton. His mother had been taken suddenly and alarmingly ill. The despatch reached him in the morning, and he had to catch a train, which gave him no time for even a good-by to Nell. He left her a note, — a whiff of honeyed sweetness, — as lover-like as he who had never in so many words told his love dared to make it. He should be with her again, he wrote, at the earliest possible moment. Where she was, and only there, he was happy, and knew what life meant.

Singularly enough, Nell found herself much more in love with him when he was gone. She began to think her unrest had been purely physical, a malady of the season, from which already she was recovering. She had certainly been ill. Her hands had been dry, her head hot, her pulse feverish. That doubtless had been why she had cared so little for her kingdom of love, and the glory of it. Now she was getting well; the quiet of the long spring days rested her. She was glad to receive Saltonstall's letters, — not love-letters, but yet letters through which love breathed like an atmosphere. His mother was better than the telegram had led him to fear; he would be back in a week. She thought she should be glad to see him; then probably he would ask his question and she should answer it, and, like the people in the fairy tales, they would be happy forever afterward. She smiled to think how quietly she took it, how at ease she felt about it. After all, how unlike love in real life was to all that poets had sung and romancers had dreamed.

Her father watched her with secret uneasiness. He liked Saltonstall, and wished him well, — would give him Nell willingly, if Nell cared to be given. But this girl was the life of his life, — her happiness the end for which his suns rose and set; and he had thought that for her happiness would mean something quite other than the placid content with which he saw her read and lay down Saltonstall's letters.

It was the nightfall of a fitful April day on which the young Adonis came back again. Strange, electrical currents had seemed to be in the air. They had affected Nell's mood; clarified her intuitions perhaps. Saltonstall met her eagerly. She was at her best estate, — brown tender eyes bright as with something unconfessed; yellow hair, soft and full, in which a shy rosebud seemed at home; dress of some clinging, delicate fabric, which fell into folds, like the drapery on a classic statue, and rustled never. A rosebud of women, indeed, — his rosebud, which he longed to gather.

But there was in her manner a certain withdrawal which was not reserve, — something subtle and undefined which made him feel that she dwelt in her own world, and it must be of her free grace if ever he entered it.

She inquired with cordial interest about his mother. Mrs. Saltonstall was better, he said, but still delicate. It had been recommended to her to go abroad, and it seemed expedient that he, the only son of her widowhood, should go with her. Then he stopped a moment,

as if to choose his words, and after all chose them ill, and went on very haltingly.

“If you would—if you could—if it were not too sudden! Nell, you know, you must have known all this time, why I am here,—that I love you more than anything else in the world; if you can love me, I do believe I can make you happy. May I try? Do not send me away over the sea without you, dear, darling Nell!”

I said that something in the air had brought clearness to Eleanor's intuitions. The whole matter seemed to set itself in order before her. She no longer said to herself that she loved no one but Saltonstall. She balanced pros and cons in the exact scales of spiritual justice. Ralph Saltonstall loved her, he and no other, was the manner in which she phrased it now. There was every correspondence of age and taste and circumstance to make their marriage suitable. That it would please her father well, she knew. Her suitor was generous and bright and sunny-tempered and unselfish. To sail with him over summer seas, in summer weather; to go down the Rhine and up the Alps; to stand among all the wonders and glories of art at his side,—what a dream of delight it might be! If only after dreams there came no waking, and if life were but a summer sail over summer seas! Nothing half so good as this would ever be offered to her again; but how if she had no right to it? If he gave her all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, surely in the kingdom of her heart he would claim to be absolute monarch.

She spoke at last—when all sides of the question had passed in swift review before her—slowly and sadly, suffering herself in advance the pain which she must give, and knowing all the good which she resigned.

“I did know what you meant, and I thought until this moment that I meant it, too; but you are worthy of more than I can give you. You want my love, and I—I would rather have you for my brother than my husband. If you cared for me less, and were less true and generous, I might marry you perhaps; but I cannot take so much and give so little.”

“Don’t you like me?” The words came very, very sadly.

“Yes, I like you so much as my friend that I would gladly love you if I could. I am more grateful for your love than if I could pay it back again; but the only man I really care for is one who does not care for me.”

Saltonstall was noble enough to be touched to the heart by the generosity of this confession. He understood well at what cost she had made it, striving thus to put an end at once to his hope and to his regret; but he had set his whole strong, tenacious young heart upon her, and he clung desperately to this first love of his life.

“If he does not care for you, and I do, as God knows I do, with all my soul, will not you turn to me in time? I could wait for you very patiently.”

She looked at him, and felt his great love calling to her through eyes and lips. She knew it was in her

power to make this one human being entirely glad, entirely happy. For a moment she was tempted to let all other thoughts or hopes or dreams fade away. She put out her hands to him in the gathering twilight. Then she drew them back again. She must be faithful to the absolute truth, and save her soul alive out of whatever fires of temptation.

“Oh, I wish I could say yes!” she said, struggling with the tears that would come. “Don’t you see how good it would be for me? and I do like you, oh, so much, and want to make you happy, only it is n’t love. I should turn away from you at the very church door if *he* called me.”

She had been so earnest to make him understand that there was no hope that she had not realized how she was paining him, and he was too generous to show her. He took her cold little hands into his for a moment, and then bent down and kissed her forehead gravely and gently, as a brother might.

“No one will ever love you better than I,” he said; “and do not think I shall ever be sorry that I have loved you. I am glad in spite of the pain. Good-by, Nell.”

She tried to answer him, but the words would not come. He looked back from the door, and saw her standing there in the tender spring twilight, — sweetest pity shining from her dewy eyes, her cheeks pale, her lips quivering, — his rosebud of women, in whose full blossoming another, not he, might be glad.

At the gate he met Mr. Revere, coming in from a walk.

"You are going early?" Mr. Revere said a little anxiously.

"Yes, and this time it is good-by as well as good-night. Miss Revere has sent me away."

"I am sorry, heartily sorry. I shall not meet any one else I would be so glad to call my son."

Saltonstall, with his twenty-one years and his handsome face and his honest heart, was only a boy, and the genuine feeling in Mr. Revere's voice quite broke down his defences. Before Nell he had borne himself manfully; but now his eyes filled with tears, and his voice shook with passionate, unavailing sobs.

"Oh, I loved her so!" he said. "I think I should have made her happy if she would have let me try, for I would have given my very life for her."

Mr. Revere had learned out of the depths of his own suffering how to understand another's. How much Saltonstall was in earnest he felt and knew, and his heart warmed toward this boy who had loved his girl with such a strong, honest, yet generous passion.

"I wish I could comfort you," he said; "but I wish yet more that she could have loved you, so that you would need no comfort. If you still care for her, she may learn sometime how to value you."

"She values me, I fear, at my true worth now," Saltonstall answered with a touch of bitterness in his self-depreciation; but he never hinted at Nell's secret. "No, I think there is no hope; and I may as well take myself and my melancholy out of your way. Good-by, Mr. Revere, and many thanks for your kindness."

And then through the gathering dusk he walked away.

Mr. Revere went in, and sat alone for a half-hour before Nell came to him. At last she came and sat on a little stool at his knee, her head leaning against him like a weary child's who comes to a mother to be comforted. It was a long time before she spoke; but she felt an influx of strength and soothing from the loving hand which rested on her hair.

"Did you know that he is gone?" she asked after a while.

"Yes, he talked with me at the gate. He loved you very dearly, Nell; are you quite sure that you were right?"

"Quite sure, papa, — for I know what love is. If Mr. Sargent had cared for me as poor Ralph does, I should be a happier girl."

Mr. Revere stooped down and drew his darling close into his arms, against the fatherly heart which had cherished her so tenderly all her life, which had beaten so passionately for her mother. Thank God that he understood the true nobleness and dignity of love, and did not try to preach down his daughter's heart with "petty maxims"! To this loyal, tender gentleman her reason was as sacred as it was conclusive.

"It is hard for Ralph," he said, after a long silence, more sympathetic than words; "but you were right, my darling, — quite right."

And she was.

X.

THE CROWNED PRINCE.

Do you think in those old Grecian nights, when Penelope was unravelling her web, there never came times when she felt some momentary impulse of attraction toward, not one of the suitors, but toward his love? Ulysses was now and always her ideal and her hope; but, oh, how long his sails were wandering over the blue, wrinkled seas! Remember that Penelope had eaten no lotus. For some one to belong to her her heart pined, as has the woman-heart through all ages. If not Ulysses, then no one, — she kept to that; but sometimes, drawing out the last-wrought stitches of the robe, she thought, she could not help thinking, what if Ulysses never came? All the same, she went on ravelling out her patient task, and the suitors saw next day no trace of the night's tears. A marble woman could be no colder, a queen no prouder than they found her, — only, when all the house was still, and stars were high in the Ithacan heavens, and a wind began to blow, such as was blowing his far-off sails none knew whither, I think she grew almost mad with impatient longing.

Eleanor Revere never thoroughly regretted that she had sent away her brave young lover. He had not been for her "the magician." She had said truly that

she should turn from him at the very church door if Sargent called her; but Sargent showed no disposition to call her. The days were long; and there came neither voice nor token. Sometimes she wondered vaguely whether she had not been unwise; she remembered all that Ralph Saltonstall was, and questioned with herself whether it might not have been possible for her to forget what he was not. Just to be loved is in itself so sweet to womanhood; and he had loved her well. Sometimes she wondered if he were to come again now whether she should have the strength to answer him as before; but all the time she knew that she had been right.

Only it seemed to her that she was growing dull and strange. An altered, pale face looked at her out of her mirror. Sargent would not call her "Flower o' the Peach" now, she thought.

"Exceeding comfortless and worn and old,
For a dream's sake,"

she whispered to herself, and grieved that all her meadows should be shorn so early, "bare before their prime."

In May she read the names of Saltonstall and his mother in the passenger list of an outward-bound steamer. She had hoped for and expected just this; and yet she was inconsequent and womanish enough to be a little saddened by it. She half wondered that he had not made one more attempt to change her mind. And then her self-esteem went down to zero, and

she wondered still more that he had ever cared for her at all, — a foolish girl who had failed so entirely where she most desired to please, and who was very dear to no one in this world except the fond old father who loved her because her mother had given her to him.

The departure of Saltonstall had its tidings also for Sargent. He did not fail to understand from it that the young Adonis had sped ill in his wooing. Then he began to question whether he himself would be likely to find it of any more use to go on a Hampshire pilgrimage. You must have discovered already that humility was not this man's crowning virtue; but just at this time he had an attack of it. He felt old and cynical and *blasé*. His fifteen or sixteen years of seniority seemed to him a formidable barrier between himself and Eleanor. If she could not care for her gay young lover, how could he expect her to care for him, with all the eager charm of his youth gone, — a man whom Arria Carlyle and Destiny had made old before his time!

He had not been a sinner above others; and yet there were some things in his life not quite pleasant to look back upon, and each one of them seemed to hold him away from Nell. He was fast getting to love this little girl with a passion which was calling up from the shadowy reaches of his past whatever was best in his nature, and making him worthier of her than he knew.

There was still another for whom Saltonstall's de-

parture had its significance. To Arria Carlyle it was the very sentence of doom. Come when the order for execution might, sentence from that moment was passed on her, — a sentence from which there was no appeal. Being a woman herself, she understood Eleanor, and knew that the kingdom of her heart but waited for the coming of the true Prince. There are hearts, like countries, divided into departments, over each a separate ruler, lords many; but Eleanor's was an empire, and its monarch, reigning unchecked and alone, might be as absolute as he would.

In June, at last, Howard Sargent went to Hampshire. The birds sang, and the flowers bloomed to welcome him. The quivering summer sky was overhead. The air was palpitant with youth and life and hope. His spirits rose as he walked across the fields in the lovely golden summer afternoon. He asked at the house to which he had been directed, for Miss Revere; and the servant pushed open a parlor door already ajar. For one instant he looked at Eleanor before she saw him, and thought how changed she was, — not less lovely, with this pale, still face, in her soft-falling, white robes, but another Eleanor than the radiant girl who had stood before him last October under the gaslight, pink of cheek, lifting neck and head like a flower above her rich, shimmering, peach-blossom robe.

“Flower o’ the Peach,” he said dreamily, moved by this reminiscence of a day that was dead; and instantly it was no misnomer. The bright, yet delicate

color he used to know came back into the pale face; the brown eyes grew full of light; the stretched-out hands and smiling lips welcomed him to his kingdom.

"I thought I should never see you again," she said softly.

"And are you glad I am here? You don't say that."

"Don't I? I thought I had;" and surely, if tender eyes and smiling lips and peach-blossom cheeks had not told him plainly enough, it proves only that he was a man, and liked his cup to overflow.

"I want you to be glad," he said gravely, "for I want you to love me. You are just the one thing I care for in this world. I have waited until you have had time to know your own heart, and I think you understand mine pretty thoroughly too; only I am a worse man than you suppose, perhaps. I am too old for you, and too hard for you, and not half good enough — but I want you."

"I thought you did n't. Oh, my dear! my dear!"

And if Howard Sargent would have had anything more or other than those words, into which a long sob broke, and the tears which fell like a passionate summer rain, I hold that it would not have been worth while to satisfy him. To do him justice, I do believe that was the one full and complete moment of his life.

Will there ever come a June when, among the birds and the flowers and the sunshine and the jubilation of all the world, he will fail to hear again in his memory

that voice with its cry of tumultuous joy, "Oh, my dear! my dear!" It was the hour when love crowned him and made him nobler than a king.

Later, when the summer dusk had come to hide her blushing, and she had grown a little accustomed to her happiness, Eleanor said half timidly, "I thought that you loved Mrs. Carlyle?"

"That was in the dead centuries. I love you to-day."

And she never doubted him.

Next morning Nell awoke happy. We all know well enough, I fear, the sensation of awaking miserable, — the sense of something one cannot lift, the gradual coming back of the real sorrow which has not loosed its grip through one moment of the fitful slumber which hid its face; but I am not sure that we all know the sensation of awaking to blessedness.

Nell opened her eyes in the golden sunshine which came through her windows. The morning was still young, and the birds were making music in it. For an instant she wondered why their song seemed something in which she had part, — what this great joy was which was waiting for a voice. And then the mists of sleep cleared, and she remembered with a sudden thrill of rapture that she was no longer her own. Only yesterday her hero had come, — her Prince, for whom she had waited not in vain. Her father had given her to him, — if giving between them were possible, — and when she went downstairs, he would meet her and say the words over again which she loved to hear,

— the lovers' vows, at which not only Jove, but Fate laughs so often.

Sargent was no laggard in love. This one creature was the prize of life to him, and he must have her his own soon. He began by talking of six weeks, and was with difficulty persuaded to wait until September.

"I know you like me best in my fineries," Nell said saucily; "and I will not come to you till I have gowns enough to captivate you in."

"I don't suppose the delay is unreasonable,—at any rate, your father insists upon it; but I do not like it. I shall not be at rest until I hold you securely. What is it that makes you seem so elusive and uncertain to-day? When you talk of putting off our bridal, I feel as if you were a wraith that might slip through my hands."

"No, I'm very real," she said, pinching him. "Are not those real fingers?"

For answer, he held her hands close and looked into her eyes. A sudden shiver seized him.

"You are not ill, are you?" he asked gravely. He had no gayety to give her back for her own.

"No. Do I look ill? I think I never felt in such high health in my life. I am thriving on happiness."

"You *shall* be happy," he cried fondly. "I am going to make you happy. No, you do not look ill. I am talking like a fool. Thank God for me, child, that I've youth enough left in me yet to be a fool."

"I do thank Him that you are foolish enough to love me," she said softly; "and I do not mean you shall be sorry, ever."

XI.

WAITING DAYS.

THERE are joys and joys. If long life and prosperity should do their uttermost, they could never bring back again the delight of that one perfect summer to Eleanor or to Sargent. Whether they were together under skies which were never before so blue, in the midst of this celestial nature which so waits on our moods, glorifying and being glorified by them, or apart, thinking of each other, writing to each other, working and living for each other, their content was boundless. No shadow crossed their summer heaven.

After that first day when Sargent had told Eleanor that she seemed to him like a wraith, he was never troubled any more by anything elusive or uncertain in the little girl he loved. She seemed to him the one sure, as the one true thing in nature. He doubted no more that she would be his through summer and winter days than he doubted that she was all he needed to make life happy. He used to talk to her about the long years before them, and bring to her all his hopes, speculations, and ambitions. For he grew ambitious, now that he loved. For her sake he would make a name of which she should be proud. To this end he worked hard.

In August he came to see her for the last time before he should claim her entirely. He had to cut his visit short a little. An important mining-case had

been intrusted to him upon which a great deal depended for him, — “for us,” he said, when he spoke of it to Eleanor. It required him to make a journey to Western Pennsylvania, in pursuance of some rather troublesome and toilsome investigations. But he should be through it all in two weeks, he assured her confidently; and in two weeks and three days she was to be his wife.

Did either of them remember Arria in their pride and joy of anticipation? Eleanor, at least, had thought often of her during the first weeks of her betrothal, had longed for a word of sympathy in her joy from this one woman who was so dear to her, — or, if that were too much to hope, for a little expression of kindness, an assurance that she was forgiven for the blissful crime of being Sargent’s love. But no word came, and latterly perhaps even Nell had become too entirely absorbed in her own happiness to greatly miss any one.

Her preparations were at last completed. She had tried on her wedding-garments, and shown herself in them to her father, — a white, gleaming shape, with large eyes looking luminously into the world of blessed dreams, bright cheeks, with their fitting changeful color, aureole of yellow hair, all softened to a spiritual and unearthly loveliness by the misty bridal veil which fell over her; Sargent’s “Flower o’ the Peach,” whom he loved so dearly.

Her father looked at her with dim eyes. It was to him almost as if his wife had risen from her grave to

stand beside him, — his dead darling, immortal in beauty as in youth.

After Nell had gone upstairs to take off her bridal whiteness, he sat thinking of the young wife of his long-past youth, on whose lips he had kissed the sweet death-smile, sealing them so for the next life and the next world. The years since then had been long and slow in their passing; but to-night they seemed like a dream from which he should soon awake. After Nell should be gone away with her husband there would be nothing left for him to do, and why might he not go home? Closing his eyes, and sitting in the twilight, he was able to fancy that soft hands not of this world touched him gently and pityingly, that a voice well known, well loved, but with something unearthly in its sweetness, spoke to him, and fond lips kissed down his eyelids. Vision or dream or wayward fancy, it was very real to him, and the next day he thought he understood why it had come.

At last Nell tripped downstairs. She had laid away her white robes tenderly, — for she was tender toward every trifle which linked her to this blessed future on whose threshold she stood. Just as she left her room, a package was handed to her which she examined by the light of the hall-lamp before she went in to her father. First she read, in a little note, these words: —

MY DEAR ELEANOR, — Since you have won what I wanted, you must have understood my silence. I would not write until I could write honestly, and honestly be glad that

you two — both of whom are dear to me — will make each other happy. The little gift I send, I wish you would wear always for my sake ; for neither you nor he are likely to have a truer friend than

ARRIA CARLYLE.

Then she opened a casket, and found in it a flexible bracelet of fine gold, curiously wrought, and exceedingly beautiful. In exquisite tracery forget-me-nots were blended with passion-flowers, and the wreath surrounded the legend, —

“ Tu as vaincu.”

“Thou hast conquered,” Nell translated, as she clasped it upon her wrist ; and now it seemed to her as if her happiness had blossomed with its last crowning golden flower of content.

She went in where her father still sat alone, and sat down herself at his feet.

“ Mrs. Carlyle has sent me a love-gift, papa, a token of peace, — this bracelet, which I am to wear forever. You must bury it and my wedding-ring with me when I die.”

“ When you die, dear child, I shall not be here to bury you. I shall have gone home, long years before then, to your mother. When Sargent has taken you away, there will be no one here to need me any more.”

“ What nonsense, darling papa ! as if I should ever in my life cease to need you. And who knows which of us will see mamma first ? I have never thought I should live to be a gray old woman. I have drunk

my happiness fast, and the wine is perfect. I have always thought mamma's was the happiest fate I ever knew any woman to have. You loved her so, and she was so blessed in your love; and then she died a sudden, painless death, before any of life's sorrows had come to her. She had never to count wrinkles and gray hairs in the glass, and question whether you could love her quite so well, seeing how changed she was. From a beautiful bride to become a beautiful angel, — does it really seem so sad to you, papa?"

Before his answer came, Miss Titus brought in a light, and setting it down, stopped to look at Eleanor. It almost startled the grave, sad spinster to see this radiant vision of the youth which had missed her, — the happiness which somehow she had missed.

"How you look to-night!" she said with a sort of mournful, yet loving curiosity. "Is it because he is coming to-morrow?"

"It is because I am so happy. I think no one was ever so happy before. Everything I wanted in life has come to me. If I could only make every one else as blessed as I am! But here is papa saying that no one will need him when I am gone, and you looking at me like an interrogation point, as if you thought me a little dazed, and did not understand how I could be so glad."

"If I don't understand, I am thankful for your sake, all the same," Miss Titus said, thawing unwontedly, and with tears in her eyes. "You have

always been a good child — always a good child — and you deserve all the happiness. But you ought to go to bed now. You must be bright for to-morrow. I am afraid, though, that you won't sleep, you are so wrought up."

"Oh, yes, I shall. It's misery that keeps people awake. I shall sleep well. Kiss me, you good soul, then I'll tell papa good-night."

Miss Titus kissed her gravely and silently, and went out.

Nell knelt at her father's side in a pretty coaxing little way she had, and lifted her graceful head toward him.

"Papa, say 'God bless you!' just as you used to when I was a little thing, and you put me to bed."

He bent over her and laid his old fond hand on her bright young head.

"God bless you, my child, my good child, God in heaven bless you; and may the one who takes you from me love you as well as I have!"

He folded her in his arms then, and kissed her, with what passionate, yearning love, and then she said her good-night, and went away.

The next morning when Mr. Revere went into the breakfast-room it was empty, at which he wondered a little, for though Nell was often late, Miss Titus was punctuality incarnate. But with the placid acceptance of things which had become his habit, he took up a review and prepared to wait. Presently

Miss Titus's face appeared in the door, — a white, scared face which he hardly knew for hers.

"Will you come?" she said hoarsely. "I can't wake up Eleanor."

He got up and followed her into Nell's chamber. Just so, long ago, in the light of a summer morning, had he seen another face lying upon the pillows with the last sweet death-smile frozen upon it forever. He had prayed that the one who took Nell from him might love her as he had loved, and One had taken her who loved her better, by as much as heaven is higher than earth.

"I will send for Dr. Green," Miss Titus said, clutching at the one straw of hope. "It may be she is in a swoon."

"Yes, send," he answered gently; "but it will be of no use. She has seen her mother. Poor Sargent!"

The doctor but confirmed what the father had known from the first. Poor pretty, happy Nell was dead. Perhaps her very happiness had killed her. She had died of the hereditary malady, — the same form of heart disease which had ended her mother's life. She had said she should sleep well; and what sleep so sound as this which no dreams troubled, — the sleep which God giveth His beloved?

All that day her father sat beside her. He thought he understood now what that pitying touch meant which he had seemed to feel the night before upon his forehead. His darling had not gone alone out into the infinite spaces, up through the ether to God. He was more awed than wretched. Heaven seemed so near to him,

— the heaven where he should find those two; and the way seemed so short that for himself he could not mourn, and for his child, gone in the very crown and flush of her earthly happiness to the blessedness which is eternal, he dared not. She had said that her mother's lot seemed to her the happiest of which she had ever known, and now in like manner she herself had been translated. But there was one to whom reunion would seem very far off, and whose life would be blighted at the root; and for him the old man sorrowed most of all.

At nightfall Sargent came.

Mr. Revere saw him walking eagerly up from the gate, his face aglow with expectation. With the slow tears of age gathering in his eyes, he went to the door and met him.

"Why, where is Eleanor?" was the first eager question. "Is she ill?"

Poor Sargent! The light feet which always sped to meet him would speed no more; the smile on the lips which he had kissed would never change now from its frozen calm; and no lover's pleadings would stir the passionless, pulseless heart.

"She *is* ill," he said anxiously, when the answer he waited for failed to come: and then gathering courage for the blow he had to deal, the old man's words dropped through the twilight stillness, "She has followed her mother."

All that night Sargent watched alone beside his dead. The father who would see her again so soon

yielded his place, and only God witnessed the bitter anguish of that vigil. She had seemed to him, as I told you, the one certain as the one true thing on the earth; and now his life lay in ruins about him, and hope and Nell were dead together.

He came forth from that vigil in the morning a changed man. It did not make him hard, — how could it when she had been so gentle, and he felt that henceforth he must be what she would have had him? — but all the brightness which had been in his face was gone. For the rest of his life he would be a sad, grave, kindly man, — unselfish because the world held no longer any prizes for which he cared to struggle.

He listened over and over to the story of Eleanor's last happy night. If anything could have comforted him, it must have been to know that the very fate which had overtaken her had seemed to her a blessed one; but it was too soon as yet for any comfort. That could only come with time, — when he should learn how short this life is to the very happiest, and feel the future which would give him back his darling drawing nigh. Then he would come to know that having once been sure of her heart, for him all the beauty and glory of life became immortal. But to-day, and for many days to come, he could but sit in the darkness of the grave.

On the day which should have been her wedding-day, they buried Nell. They put on her her glistening bridal robes. Arria's bracelet had never left her arm; and the plain gold ring which Sargent had

brought he slipped upon her finger. Orange-blossoms were twisted in her golden hair; and beautiful, with more than the beauty of life, was this bride of heaven.

"It must be that she is happy," Sargent said to himself, as he looked his last upon her face. "That smile could have come from nothing but the perfect peace of the departing spirit; and yet may it not be that even in heaven the days will seem long until I too am there?"

At the patience of the spirit which has learned the meaning of eternity, how could he guess?

They buried their dead in a sunny nook where earliest flowers would bloom, and earliest birds sing. A little brook hard by made murmurous, lulling music; the winds seemed to breathe softly, and the sky to bend in love. The time would come when for Sargent, as even now for Mr. Revere, all these signs and voices of the unchanging yet ever-renewed nature would mean hope and resurrection; but to-day they seemed only to be mocking at the frail human hearts, which loved and suffered and grew still, while yet suns shone and birds sang and winds blew, and the jubilant Nature which never mourns for her children was ever young.

Before the first snow fell Sargent went back to that little grave. The brown autumn turf was lifted to lay the father beside his child. The old man had gone home.

Sargent envied him with a bitter, despairing envy; but perhaps no one mourned for him except Miss

Titus, who had cared for him so long, and whose house was left unto her desolate.

As Sargent turned away, a mournful wind of death began to blow, and swept down over those two graves the dead leaves of the dead year; and another wind as melancholy and as desolate arose in his soul, sweeping his dead hopes down the gale.

XII.

AN ANSWER TO YOUR QUESTION.

IF I were writing only the story of Eleanor Revere, I should have left it at this point, nor thought its ending altogether mournful. She had lived and she had loved. Love had never deceived her, or friendship failed. As she herself had said, "From a beautiful bride to become a beautiful angel, does it really seem so sad?"

But you will still ask, "Did he forget her?" and if I tell you the life he lives to-day, each of you can answer the question according to his own lights.

It was many months after Nell went home before Sargent resumed any of his old habits. But at last he began to take up his business again, and to find in the occupation which it gave him a dreary solace. At length business led him out to Longwood. Mrs. Carlyle's property had been placed in his hands, and he was obliged to consult with her on some affairs important to her interests. She was so lonely, and it was

so evident that his visits gave her pleasure, that after a while he fell into his old habit of going out there frequently; and with his human need of companionship he grew to find a certain interest in these visits. Do not fancy that she fascinated him anew; you cannot coax flame from dead embers, try how you will. But he was alone in the world, and she was nearer to him, even in point of actual relationship, than any one else. Utter solitude becomes at last intolerable to human nature, and it was not strange that he should seek Longwood when Longwood always opened to him hospitable doors.

When Eleanor had been three years dead, it chanced one day that he said to Arria in the idlest way, led by the merest impulse of momentary curiosity, "How is it that you have never gone back into society? Young and free and rich, — why, all the good things of life wait for you?"

"*All?*" she said, — that low, subtile voice of hers dropping into its pathetic minor key. "I think the world out of which I have slipped held few good things for which I should care to struggle."

Sargent went home with a new thought in his mind. Some instinct told him that she cared for him still; and they were both alone. If she would be contented with the little he had to give her, what if he should marry her, and they should finish their days together?

Had he forgotten?

Next day he went out again to Longwood, and Arria met him with a little flutter of pleased surprise,

for his visits were not wont to be of daily occurrence. But his first words, after they had sat down in the leaf-green morning-room where Nell had found them together long ago, were not words of love for Mrs. Carlyle. He might make her his wife indeed, if it still suited her to become so; but the woman who had given him up once for the world should never have the triumph over his dead darling of believing that she held his whole satisfied heart.

"It is more than three years," he said, "since Eleanor went home. Her going took all the hope and ambition out of my life. I shall never be now what she would have made me, for I have no spring of youth in me any more. I cannot be much to any woman, for I can never love as I loved her,—as I love her to-day; but you are more to me than any one who is left in this world. I like to have you near me, though I find most society a weariness. If you also are lonely, and if you still care for me a little, why should we not live out our lives together?"

She lifted those splendid passionate, troubled eyes of hers to his face.

"Is that all?" she asked with that quiver of pathos in her voice which had been so soul-subduing to him once. "Is the past then dead forever, dead beyond hope?"

She bent forward and buried her face in her hands, and he could only guess at her emotion by the trembling of the fingers which held her bowed head.

He too was strangely moved. He knew that this

woman loved him, and had loved him long, — this woman, whom he had loved once with all his passionate heart of youth.

He drew a little closer to her and put his arm around her. Then he kissed her for the first time since that day long ago, when she had told him that she was going to marry Job Carlyle, and he thought that her words had broken his heart. The emotion of that hour, of that moment, came back to him now, — came back, but only to his memory. He recalled how madly, despite her feeble struggle against him, he had held her to his heart then, and with his lips against hers, prayed that they might both die then and there. What would she have given to awaken one throb of that emotion now? But it was as dead as his dead darling. He knew that the kiss with which he kissed her was cold, but Arria made no complaint.

“ You know that I can make you but one answer,” she said at last, very humbly. “ It will be something to live in the house with you, to see you every day, even though you can never love me as you used. You are all I care for in this world.”

And so they were married very quietly, one October day, and their sober, middle-aged life together began. As it went on, I fear that to Arria at least it was a disappointment. I think in the midst of her humility she had counted on regaining after a time some of her lost power. But there were lines that she could never cross. Sargent was always kind, — the gentlest, kindest man in those days whom I ever knew, — as if

he would atone by patient sweetness for all that it was no longer in his power to give. He was strangely forbearing with his wife's moods; and until hope died within her, she had many of them. But the time came at length when her pulses beat as evenly as Sargent's own, and she ceased to demand of him even in her heart what she discovered that it was forever out of his power to give, — when trifles stirred her no longer, and she plucked the dull and scentless hearts-ease which springs from the grave of longing.

Do you think Eleanor, looking down, if so the blessed dead can look, on the man she had loved so well, would have cared to change fates with her whose head lay on the pillow beside him, — Eleanor, beloved even in her grave as few living women are in their lives?

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